BOOST YOUR TV'S SOUND
Why you need a soundbar p62

GOOGLE KILLS THE BEST AD-BLOCKER
But we've got a clever solution p6

Computer active
ISSUE 705 | 12 – 25 MARCH 2025
Learn something new in every issue

Fake news, real scams – page 11

HOW TO MASTER GOOGLE GEMINI
This AI chatbot might just be BETTER THAN CHATGPT!

p35

HACK YOUR MAPS!

Secret tricks to make them work EXACTLY how you want p50

- ☑ Save money on petrol for every journey
- ☑ Get FREE walking and cycling routes
- ☑ Avoid speeding fines and toll roads
- ☑ Find FREE parking spaces across the UK
- ☑ Always get the cheapest train tickets
- ✚ Download maps to use offline

PLUS

WIPE JUNK FROM YOUR TV STICK p74
So you can watch more on it

BEAT MICROSOFT'S HUGE PRICE RISE
It's adding an AI tax to Office p60

EXCLUSIVE
£15 Discount
with code **ACT25**

FUTURE-PROOF

Join our communities

PCSPECIALIST
www.pcspecialist.co.uk

WELCOME

EDITORIAL
Content Director Marc Chacksfield
Group Editor Daniel Booth
Deputy Editor Robert Irvine
Production Editor Graham Brown
Art Editor Katie Peat
Contributors Keumars Afifi-Sabet, Dinah Greek, Richard Holt, Jonathan Parkyn, Nik Rawlinson, Andy Shaw

ADVERTISING
Advertising Manager Alexandra Thomas

MARKETING AND CIRCULATION
Subscriptions Sheri Taubes

PRODUCTION
Head of Production Stephen Catherall
Senior Production Manager Lawrence Brookes

INTERNATIONAL LICENSING AND SYNDICATION
Computeractive is available for licensing and syndication. To find out more contact us at licensing@futurenet.com or view our available content at www.futurecontenthub.com.
Head of Print Licensing Rachel Shaw

ONWARD RESALE
This publication may not be resold or otherwise distributed, whether at, below or above face value. Nor can this publication be advertised for sale, transfer or distribution.

PERMISSIONS
Material may not be reproduced in any form without the written consent of the publisher. Please address such requests to editor@computeractive.co.uk.

LIABILITY
While every care was taken preparing this magazine, the publishers cannot be held responsible for the accuracy of the information or any consequence arising from it. All judgments are based on equipment available to Computeractive at the time of review. Computeractive takes no responsibility for the content of external websites whose addresses are published in the magazine.

SUBSCRIPTIONS
For any enquiries and orders, email help@magazinesdirect.com, go to magazinesdirect.com. Manage your subscription online with MyMagazine. Visit www.mymagazine.co.uk/FAQ to view frequently asked questions or log in at www.mymagazine.co.uk

FULL SUBSCRIPTION PRICES
UK £77.74, Europe €144, USA $163, Rest of the world £125

HOW TO ORDER PAST ISSUES
To purchase single past issues (print format only) visit: magazinesdirect.com (click on 'Single issues' tab) – or email: help@magazinesdirect.com.
Magazinesdirect.com is owned and operated by Future Publishing Limited.

© Copyright Future PLC 2024. All rights reserved
Images from Alamy and Getty Images

Computeractive is a registered trademark. Neither the whole of this publication nor any part of it may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means without the written permission of the publishers

Distributed by Marketforce

Average sales, **Jan-Dec 2024 48,816** copies per issue.

FUTURE
Connectors. Creators. Experience Makers.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

Chief Executive Officer **Jon Steinberg**
Non-Executive Chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief Financial Officer **Sharjeel Suleman**
Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

From the Editor

I'd be lost without my maps. They tell me where to find the cheapest petrol, how to park for free, where to go walking with the kids and how far the nearest coffee shop is. I have more map apps on my phone than any other type, while the maps folder in my browser's bookmarks is bursting.

I know from your emails that you love maps just as much. They don't get as much attention as AI chatbots, streaming services or 4K TVs, but they're often much more useful. Robert Irvine agrees, and in his Cover Feature recommends the best ways to customise mapping tools so they work better for your needs.

What I love is that his tips are for different types of journey (walking, cycling, driving, trains) and help you both before setting off and during your trip. And for the times you can't get a signal he explains how to download maps to view them offline. They'll give you a new direction in life.

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk

p6
p62
p35
p50
p74
p60
BOOST YOUR TV'S SOUND
Why you need a soundbar
GOOGLE KILLS THE BEST AD-BLOCKER
But we've got a clever solution p6
HOW TO MASTER GOOGLE GEMINI
This AI chatbot might just be BETTER THAN CHATGPT!
Computer active
Fake news, real scams – page 11
Learn something new in every issue
HACK YOUR MAPS!
Secret tricks to make them work EXACTLY how you want p50
Save money on petrol for every journey
Get FREE walking and cycling routes
Avoid speeding fines and toll roads
Find FREE parking spaces across the UK
Always get the cheapest train tickets
Download maps to use offline
PLUS
WIPE JUNK FROM YOUR TV STICK
So you can watch more on it
BEAT MICROSOFT'S HUGE PRICE RISE
It's adding an AI tax to Office p60

THIS ISSUE IN NUMBERS

32.4/29Gbps
Top read and write speeds of the Corsair EX400U portable SSD – *p25*

3.9
Latest version of the Files program, with new 'Cards' view – *p40*

£599
Cheapest price of Apple's new iPhone 16e – *p7*

HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLs

We use snipcas to turn long URLs that are hard to type into ones that are short and simple. They aren't websites themselves, which means they won't be recognised if you type them into Google. Instead, you need to type them into your browser address bar, then press Enter. Doing this will take you to the correct website.

Contents

12 – 25 March 2025 • **Issue 705**

6 **News** Google disables popular ad-blocker uBlock Origin

10 **Question of the Fortnight** Why does the Govt want to access your private files?

11 **Protect Your Tech** Fake adverts promoted by celebrities

12 **Letters** Council should let Howells dig for Bitcoin, but demand more money

14 **Consumeractive** Can Zoom refuse refund for unwanted subscription renewal?

16 **Grow Your Family Tree** Search criminal records

18 **Best Free Software** 4K Video Downloader Plus 25

21 **Named & Shamed** Microsoft's 'don't uninstall' guide to uninstalling Edge

Reviews

22 **Chuwi UBox AMD Ryzen 5 6600H** Stylish mini PC passes the taste test

23 **HP Chromebook Plus 15.6** Classy laptop lets you work from Chrome

24 **Oppo Pad 3** 12in tablet provides the big picture

25 **Corsair EX400U** Blisteringly fast SSD gives you more drive

26 **Tapo D235 video doorbell** See who's knocking at your door

28 **Cherry Xtrfy M64** Wireless mouse takes charge

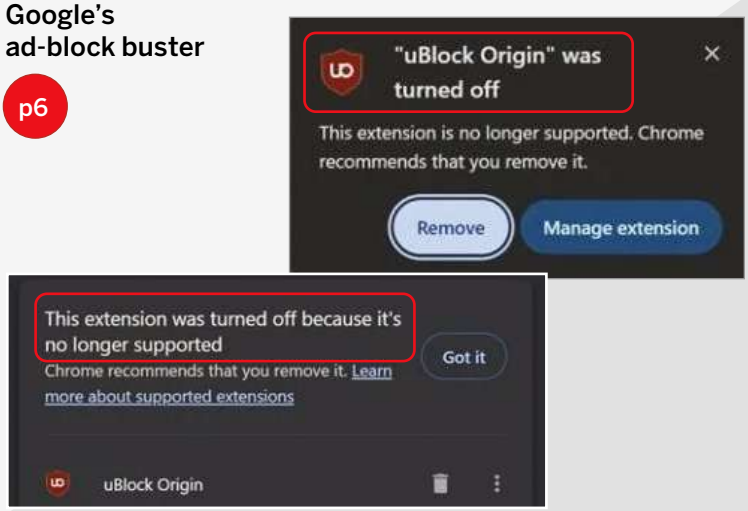
Iniu Wireless Charger Stand Phone charger goes against the current

29 **Sony HT-SF150** Soundbar speaks for itself

30 **Buy It/Competition** Win a SwannBuddy4K video doorbell

Google's ad-block buster

p6


"uBlock Origin" was turned off
This extension is no longer supported. Chrome recommends that you remove it.
Remove
Manage extension
This extension was turned off because it's no longer supported
Chrome recommends that you remove it. Learn more about supported extensions
Got it
uBlock Origin

HP Chromebook Plus 15.6

p23

Oppo Pad 3

p24

Subscribe now!
See page 58 for our special subs offer
SAVE 35%

Workshops & Tips

35 How to... Master Google's Gemini AI chatbot

38 Easily edit CSV files

40 Readers' Tips
Use the new 'Card view' in Files

42 Browser Tips
Discover the best new features in Brave

44 Phone and Tablet Tips
Move Edge's address bar to the bottom

46 Make Windows Better
Restore File Explorer tabs when you restart your PC

47 Make Office Better Remove duplicate entries from spreadsheets

48 In the Club
Promote events with a Facebook Story

49 What's All the Fuss About?
Grok

50 COVER FEATURE
Hack your maps!
We explore the best new and hidden features in mapping websites and apps

60 Beat Microsoft's Office price rise
How to avoid Microsoft 365's imminent price hike and pay only for features you want

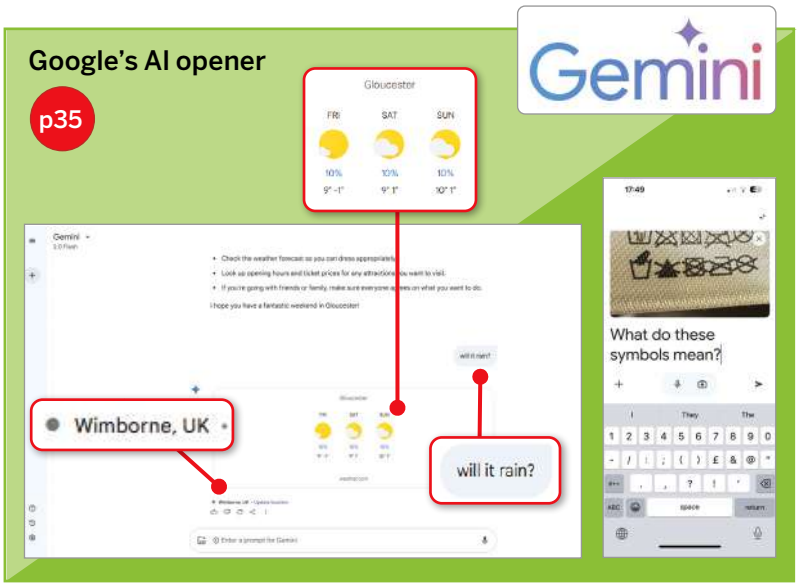
62 Boost your TV's audio with a soundbar
Replace your TV's lacklustre speakers with a speech-enhancing soundbar

64 Problems Solved
Why can't I print email attachments?

71 Reader Support Is there any point me buying a Wi-Fi 6 router?

72 Jargon Buster

74 Easy When You Know How
Robert Irvine uninstalls junk from his Fire TV stick



HACK YOUR MAPS!
COVER FEATURE P50
Secret tricks to make them work EXACTLY how you want p50
Save money on petrol for every journey
Get FREE walking and cycling routes
Avoid speeding fines and toll roads
Find FREE parking spaces across the UK
Always get the cheapest train tickets
Download maps to use offline

Google disables popular ad-blocker uBlock Origin

Google is disabling the popular uBlock Origin extension from Chrome for some users, forcing them to switch to another tool to keep blocking adverts.

It's a result of Google's new Manifest V3 technical standard for browsers, which applies across all browsers built on Google's Chromium software, including Brave, Microsoft Edge, Opera and Vivaldi.

Google claims these new rules will make extensions faster, more stable and more private, but critics say it will also stop ad-blockers working properly.

UBlock Origin's developers warned users last year that the extension would soon stop working.

Some users on Reddit (www.snipca.com/54000) say Chrome now turns off the extension. This was backed up by the website Bleeping Computer, which posted a screenshot showing a message saying the extension had been 'turned off' 1.

If you click 'Manage extension' you'll see the message, 'This extension was turned off because it's no longer supported' 2.

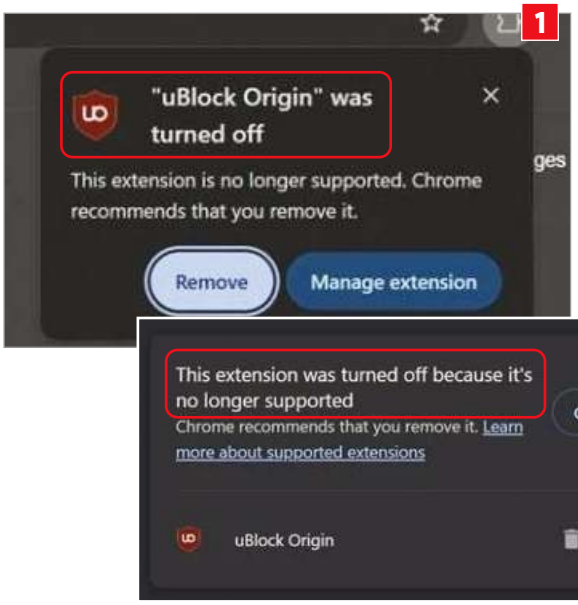
However, other users have reported simply turning the extension back on again.

You can still install uBlock Origin from the Chrome Web Store (www.snipca.com/54001), though it comes with the message 'This extension may soon no longer be supported'.

Its developer Raymond Hill advises users to switch to the 'Lite' version of the extension (www.snipca.com/54003). This does work with Manifest V3, but Hill admits it may not work as effectively as the original.

He said he'll keep updating the original because it will continue to work well on Firefox, which isn't built on Chromium.

For now it will also work on browsers that are delaying the implementation of Manifest V3, such as Brave and Vivaldi.


1
"uBlock Origin" was turned off
This extension is no longer supported. Chrome recommends that you remove it.
Remove
Manage extension
2
This extension was turned off because it's no longer supported
Chrome recommends that you remove it. Learn more about supported extensions
Got it
uBlock Origin
Credit: Bleeping Computer

WHAT WE THINK

This has been coming for months, but there are plenty of alternative ways to eliminate adverts. We switched to uBlock Origin Lite a while back and it seems to work just as well, despite being a "pared back" version of the original. We also like AdGuard (www.snipca.com/52253), which has been revamped to get around Google's new rules (see Issue 695's Workshop). And overall, you should always see fewer ads in Brave and Vivaldi than Chrome.

Have 'Advanced' voice chats with ChatGPT for free

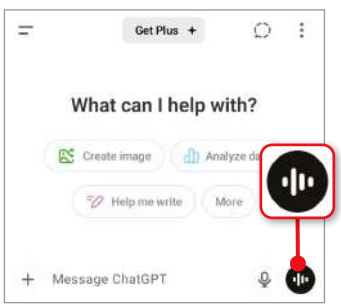
You can now have more natural voice conversations with ChatGPT for free after OpenAI made its Advanced Voice Mode available for everyone.

However, for now it works only in the phone and tablet app and the downloadable desktop version (www.snipca.com/54006), not online. It also limits you to 15 minutes of conversations a month.

To use it, sign into your ChatGPT account (or create one), then tap or click the black icon at the bottom right (see screenshot). Swipe or click across to hear different voices and select one you like.

Finally, speak into your device, making sure the microphone icon at the bottom left is black.

To use Advanced Voice Mode for more than 15 minutes a month you'll need to subscribe to ChatGPT Plus for £16 a month (www.snipca.com/53443).



You'll like this...
Google makes it easier to remove personal data from results (www.snipca.com/54007)

but not this...
Hackers have hijacked 16 popular Chrome extensions (www.snipca.com/54008)

Apple offers AI tools in new ‘budget’ iPhone

Apple has launched the cheapest iPhone yet that has AI tools, though it’s much more expensive than the budget iPhone SE, which was previously the cheapest.

The cheapest version of the iPhone 16e has 128GB of storage and costs £599. There are also 256GB and 512GB models, priced £699 and £899 respectively.

By contrast the most recent iPhone SE, which Apple no longer sells, cost from £419 to £569 (with 64GB to 256GB of storage) when it launched in 2022. However, it never had any AI tools.

The iPhone 16e provides complete access to Apple Intelligence, which is a set of AI features that aim to improve your photos and writing, and give better responses from Siri.

It also includes Visual Intelligence, which lets you point your iPhone’s camera at an object and get information on what you’re looking at, whether that’s through ChatGPT or online search.

Its screen is 6.1 inches, the same as the standard iPhone 16, but smaller than the iPhone 16 Plus (6.3in) and iPhone 16 Pro (6.9in). There’s one 48-megapixel camera on the front.

APPLE BRINGS HEARING AID TO UK

Apple has added the Hearing Aid feature to AirPods Pro 2 in the UK, after first launching it in the US last year. It tests your hearing then amplifies sounds you find hard to hear. AirPods Pro 2 cost £229 from Apple at www.snipca.com/54002. Read more on Apple’s site (www.snipca.com/53994) and in Issue 699’s How To: ‘Use hearing aids with phones and Windows’.

Google axes old Chromecast despite no iPlayer in replacement

Google has stopped selling the Chromecast, leaving the more expensive TV Streamer (£99) as the only streaming device it now offers.

However, this still lacks the iPlayer app because of what the BBC calls a “technical issue”.This probably means the TV Streamer hasn’t passed the BBC’s strict compatibility tests to guarantee the iPlayer works on it.

The BBC said last November that the iPlayer would be added soon, and included the TV Streamer in its list of supported devices (see Issue 698, page 7).

But the TV Streamer has now been removed from the list. Instead, it shows just the 2020 and 2022 versions of the ‘Chromecast with Google TV’ and the original Chromecast from 2013 (see www.snipca.com/52942).

The last Chromecast on sale was the 2022 edition of the ‘Chromecast with Google TV’ (pictured), priced £34.99. It’s been removed from Google’s store as well as from Amazon, Argos and Currys, though some private sellers are selling them brand new on eBay.

The TV Streamer, released last September, has four times the storage (32GB) and an Ethernet port.

Despite being impressed by its specifications, we gave it only two stars in our review because it lacked apps for the iPlayer and Channel 4 (Issue 694, page29). The latter was added in October.

Buy the TV Streamer from Google’s UK store at www.snipca.com/53996.

• Wipe junk from your TV stick - page 74

IN BRIEF

MICROSOFT TESTS FREE OFFICE WITH ADVERTS

Microsoft is testing a free version of Office that shows adverts when you use Word, PowerPoint and Excel (pictured). It contains basic versions of these tools, and saves to OneDrive only, not your computer. Microsoft confirmed the test but said it has no plans to release it fully. It recently increased the cost of Microsoft 365 subscriptions by 42 per cent (see page 60).

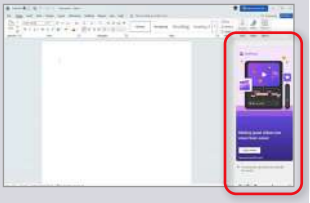


IMAGE @Beebom

UPDATE LIBREOFFICE NOW TO FIX FLAW

LibreOffice has urged anyone using version 24.8 to update it immediately to fix a security flaw when you use Ctrl+click to open a hyperlink. Click Help at the top then ‘Check for Updates’, or install it afresh from www.snipca.com/53998. The latest version is 25.2.1, released in early February.

TOMORROW’S WORLD

Polish firm Clone Robotics calls its Protoclone robot a “faceless, anatomically accurate synthetic human”, but it’s more like Frankenstein’s monster twitching to life. It has 500 sensors attached to fake bones, joints, tendons and muscles, and can walk on two legs. Watch it if you dare at www.snipca.com/53997.

IN BRIEF

RING RELEASES FIRST 2K SECURITY CAMERA

Ring has released its first 2K security camera, the Outdoor Camera Plus (pictured), which also has 'Low-Light Sight' technology to process images in near-dark conditions. You can see live views and talk to visitors for free, but recording footage requires a £4.99 monthly subscription. It costs £99.99 from Amazon: www.snipca.com/53985.

YOUTUBE TO CUT 'DISRUPTIVE' ADVERTS

YouTube says it will show fewer "disruptive" adverts during videos. Instead, it will time them so they appear at "natural breakpoints", such as pauses or transitions. It follows complaints from YouTube video makers that viewers stop watching if ads appear in the middle of sentences or action sequences.

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!

Mayors of towns near Mount Etna in Sicily say selfie takers are risking their lives by getting too close to lava flows. Tourists suffer broken ankles and hypothermia as they trudge through snow looking for the perfect pic to post online. Turn on YouTube's Auto-translate and watch this Italian news report: www.snipca.com/53991.

Amazon launches AI version of Alexa, but it's not free

Amazon has launched a new AI-powered version of Alexa that you can have spoken conversations with, but you'll have to pay to use it if you're not a Prime subscriber.

It's called Alexa+, and Amazon hopes it will be a voice-controlled rival to the AI chatbots ChatGPT, Google Gemini and Grok.

It will be included in Prime subscriptions at no further cost, but non-members will have to pay $19.99 (£16) per month. Amazon said it'll launch in the US in March before arriving in other countries later in the year. UK pricing has yet to be announced.

Amazon says conversations with Alexa+ feel "expansive and natural", and it understands what you mean whether you're speaking in "half-formed thoughts, using colloquial expressions, or exploring complex ideas".

It added that Alexa+ "feels less like interacting with technology, and more like engaging with an insightful friend".

Mara Segal, director of Alexa, said people will now be able to share "just about anything" with the tool. Amazon claims that if you share your emails and photographs with Alexa+ it will be able to search through them for things you request.

It also remembers "things that will make the experience more useful for you", Amazon said, such as family recipes, important dates, facts and dietary preferences.

It will be available on devices as far back as the second-generation Echo Dot (pictured), which launched in 2017. For devices with screens, it will be available on the first-generation Echo Show 8, which launched in 2019, and later models. Watch Amazon demonstrating Alexa+ at www.snipca.com/53989.

Will you share your photos and emails with Alexa+? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk www.snipca.com/53986

Sky to launch cheaper Glass TVs

Sky has said it will release a cheaper version of its Glass TVs later this year.

The Sky Glass Air range (pictured) has the same 4K Quantum Dot HDR screen as the standard Glass TVs, and an ambient light sensor that automatically adjusts the brightness of images depending on your surroundings. However, it doesn't have the Dolby Atmos soundbar that's built into current Sky Glass TVs.

Instead it will have simpler 2.0 stereo speakers, which don't have a subwoofer or extra channels for surround-sound effects. This makes it smaller, lighter and more affordable.

Sky announced Glass Air when confirming the release of the Glass Gen 2, the second version of its Glass TVs.

This new range of TVs use Quantum Dot technology that makes "darks darker and brights brighter", and an improved Dolby Atmos soundbar.

Both Glass Gen 2 and Glass Air come in the same three screen sizes: 43in, 55in and 65in. Sky hasn't confirmed prices for Glass Air, but the Gen 2 TVs cost £14 per month for 43in, £19 for 55in and £24 for 65in.

You can also buy them outright for £699, £949 and £1,199 respectively. Read more at www.snipca.com/53990.

Gmail users targeted in scam that combines phone and email

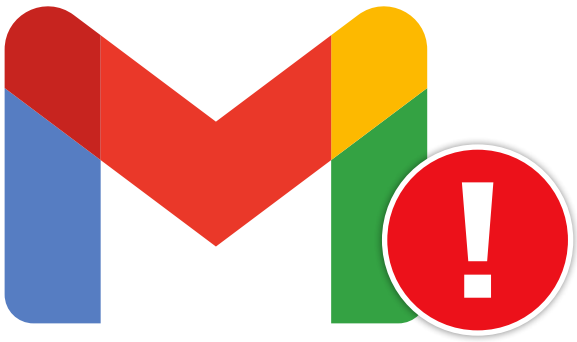
Security experts have repeated a warning from the FBI about criminals using AI to make phone calls and send emails in a sophisticated scam targeting millions of Gmail users.

Researchers at Malwarebytes said the threat remains high partly because the 'kit' scammers buy to carry out the attack is so cheap – starting at just $5.

The FBI said last year that the scammers' "sophisticated tactics can result in devastating financial losses, reputational damage, and compromise of sensitive data".

The attack starts with the fraudsters phoning you to claim your Gmail has been hacked. At the same time they send you an email that claims to be from Google and appears to confirm that your account has been hacked.

The scammers then ask for your Gmail recovery code so they can 'rescue' your account.



These are the codes Google sends to your phone or backup email address so you can reset your password and sign back into your account if you've been locked out.

Some victims even receive recorded voice messages that claim to be from a Google employee urging you to hand over your recovery code.

Using this code the scammers can access your entire Google account – not just your emails, but anything saved on Google Drive such as documents, photos and videos.

With this amount of personal data the hackers would easily be able to steal your online identity.

Malwarebytes said that, while none of the elements used in the attacks are new, combining them increases scammers' chances of tricking people.

To stay safe, never give your recovery code to anyone who asks for it online or in a phone call. No reputable company will ever request this.

• **Beware these Nana Mugchetty and Stacey Solomon scams – page 11**

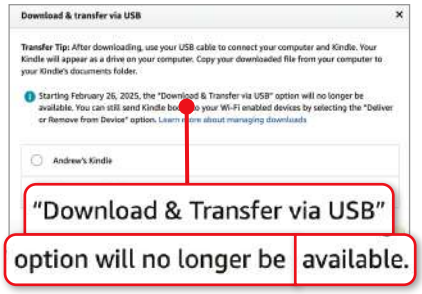
Amazon stops you moving ebooks by USB

Amazon has scrapped the 'Download & Transfer via USB' option for Kindle ebook readers.

This feature, which Amazon axed on 26 February, let you download purchased books to your computer and then copy them to a Kindle over USB.

It has existed since the days when Kindles didn't come with Wi-Fi connectivity. But now you'll only be able to access your books online via your Amazon account, synced to other Kindle devices by Wi-Fi or through the Kindle app on other devices.

When you download an ebook Amazon shows you a message confirming that you can no longer transfer it by USB (pictured).


Download & transfer via USB
Transfer Tip: After downloading, use your USB cable to connect your computer and Kindle. Your Kindle will appear as a drive on your computer. Copy your downloaded file from your computer to your Kindle's documents folder.
Starting February 26, 2025, the "Download & Transfer via USB" option will no longer be available. You can still send Kindle books to your Wi-Fi enabled devices by selecting the "Deliver or Remove from Device" option. Learn more about managing downloads
Andrew's Kindle
"Download & Transfer via USB"
option will no longer be available.

Amazon hasn't said why it's removed the option, but it's probably an attempt to keep customers locked into the Kindle system.

It will frustrate users who don't want to be tied to Amazon's policy changes or occasional decisions to remove books. It's also a reminder that you don't actually own ebooks you've bought to read on your Kindle – or indeed any digital content downloaded to a phone, tablet or TV.

Kindle users who switch to another ebook reader like the Kobo often use the 'Download & Transfer via USB' feature to move their ebooks.

They can remove the DRM and convert the files to an open format like EPUB that works on any ebook reader.

Have you switched from Amazon Kindle to another ebook reader? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

IN BRIEF

SEAGATE'S NEW SSD LOOKS LIKE USB STICK

Seagate has released an SSD that looks like a USB stick, continuing a popular design trend. The Ultra-Compact SSD (pictured) is available in both 1TB and 2TB, priced £91 and £190 respectively (www.snipca.com/53915). It measures 69x18x9mm (HxWxD). We'll review it soon.

KEEP USING FIREFOX ON W7 UNTIL SEPTEMBER

Firefox will keep working on Windows 7 and 8.1 computers until September. Mozilla released Firefox 115 in July 2023 as the final version for those operating systems, and had planned to axe support in March 2025. But it has now decided to extend it by six months because enough people still use the browser on 7 and 8.1. Microsoft ended support for those systems in 2020 and 2023 respectively.

GET QLED FREELY TVs FOR UNDER £400

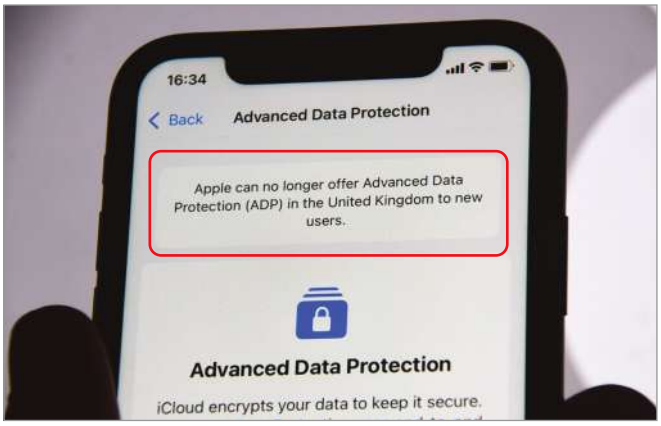
German manufacturer Metz has launched a range of Freely TVs, starting at £379 for 43in sets. The MQE7600ZUK range (pictured) has a QLED screen with a matte-finish screen to reduce glare, both features you'd normally only see in more expensive TVs. Prices go up to £659 for 65in TVs. They're on sale exclusively at Euronics (www.euronics.co.uk).

Why does the Govt want to access your private files?

It asked Apple to disable its most advanced security protection

No company hates being told what to do more than Apple. In 2022, the EU forced it to ditch its Lightning charging cable for USB-C, then a year later ordered it to let users install apps from outside the App Store. Now, the UK Government has pressured it into weakening iCloud encryption, putting your private files at risk of being accessed by other people.

The move came as a surprise to Apple and many cyber-security experts. In February, the Government asked the company for access to encrypted files that users have stored on its online storage service iCloud.


16:34
Back
Advanced Data Protection
Apple can no longer offer Advanced Data Protection (ADP) in the United Kingdom to new users.
Advanced Data Protection
iCloud encrypts your data to keep it secure.

> "It's like smashing open Pandora's box and hoping the chaos stays neatly inside"

The Home Office made the demand under the Investigatory Powers Act (IPA) – slammed by critics as a 'snooper's charter' – which compels firms to provide information to law-enforcement agencies.

Apple could have responded by creating a 'backdoor' specifically for the Government to access iCloud files. But instead it chose to turn off its Advanced Data Protection (ADP) for all UK users. This is a form of end-to-end encryption (E2EE) that encrypts files (photos, videos, documents and messages) so that only *you* can see them – not Apple, not hackers, not security services and certainly not the Government. It makes iCloud files more secure than those stored in Google Drive, which doesn't use full encryption.

It's the first time Apple has turned off ADP in any country. It said it was "deeply disappointed that our customers in the UK will no longer have the option to enable ADP, especially given the continuing rise of data breaches and other threats to customer privacy" (www.snipca.com/54017).

Customers who use ADP will "eventually" need to turn it off, Apple confirmed. If UK users now try to turn it on (using Apple's instructions at www.snipca.com/54013), they'll see the message 'Apple can no longer offer Advanced Data Protection (ADP) in the United Kingdom to new users' (see screenshot).

The Home Office hasn't explained why it made the request, simply stating: "We do not comment on operational matters, including for example confirming or denying the existence of any such notices." But security officials and Government ministers have for years argued that accessing encrypted files is vital for monitoring terrorists and paedophile gangs.

Charities for child protection are likely to welcome the move. Rani Govender, policy manager for child safety online at the NSPCC, told BBC News she now wants Apple to "make sure that they also implement more child safety measures, so that children are properly protected on their services".

However, most cyber-security experts were stunned by Apple's decision. Graeme Stewart from Israeli firm Check Point said it's like "smashing open Pandora's box and hoping the chaos stays neatly inside". "At its heart, encryption isn't just for criminals; it's a shield for millions of law-abiding citizens, businesses, and critical infrastructure," he added.

Will Cathcart, head of WhatsApp, wrote on X: "One country's secret order risks putting all of us in danger and it should be stopped." Others pointed out that Apple's encryption still works worldwide, so terrorists and paedophiles could simply store their files outside the UK.

US politicians have also raised concerns. Democrat Senator Ron Wyden told the BBC that Apple's decision "creates a dangerous precedent which authoritarian countries will surely follow". Others have objected to what they see as the UK Government interfering with US companies.

It's a complex issue, but you're not powerless. We'll explain in our next issue how you can still keep your files encrypted.

THE FACTS

- Apple has removed end-to-end encryption for files UK users store on iCloud following a demand from the Government
- It means Apple and law-enforcement agencies will be able to see photos, documents and messages that previously were impossible to access
- The Government didn't explain why it made the request, but Apple said it was "gravely disappointed" that end-to-end encryption would no longer be available in the UK

Protect your tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

Fake adverts promoted by celebrities

What's the threat?

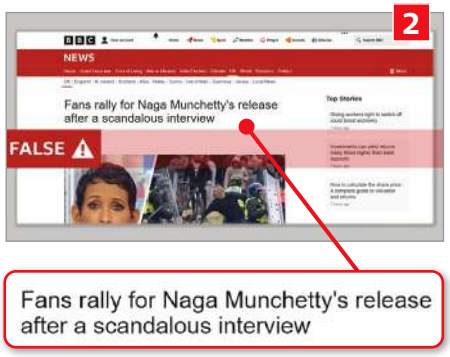
Fake adverts featuring celebrities and prominent figures were the most-reported scam ads to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) in 2024. It said scammers are using this tactic to promote fraud involving "cryptocurrency, investment, keto slimming gummies and the like" (see www.snipca.com/53888).

Scammers are increasingly presenting the adverts as news stories with sensationalist headlines from major broadcasters – in the hope that a BBC, ITV or Sky logo will make them appear genuine. The ASA gave the example of TV presenter Stacey Solomon speaking to BBC News about a "scandal that engulfed the whole world" (see screenshot 1). More recently *BBC Breakfast* presenter Naga Munchetty wrote about a fake story which claimed she gave a "scandalous interview" (www.snipca.com/53889, 2).

The ASA also warned about deepfake adverts, which are videos, images or audio clips that have been digitally manipulated to look convincing. It cited a deepfake video ad featuring King Charles recommending cryptocurrency investment.

Other trends in 2024 included ads for free or heavily discounted local travel, and low-cost deals for expensive items, such as Smeg kettles for £3 and iPhones for £1.78. These are often linked to well-known supermarkets and retailers, the ASA said.

BBC NEWS
Is this the end of her career?
THE SCANDAL THAT ENGULFED THE WHOLE WORLD, SHOCKED STACEY SOLOMON DIDN'T KNOW THE CAMERA WAS STILL RECORDING
1


NEWS
Fans rally for Naga Munchetty's release after a scandalous interview
FALSE
Fans rally for Naga Munchetty's release after a scandalous interview
2

How can you stay safe?

The biggest weapon against fake ads is your scepticism. Never believe any celebrity endorsement online until you've done more research. If you see a news story presented as an advert, visit the broadcaster's official site to see if it's there.

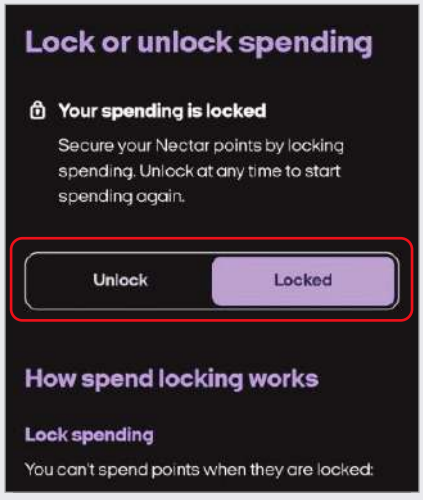
Also note that while deepfake videos are getting more realistic, they still often have jerky facial movements and strange-sounding speech.

New tools | Lock your points on Sainsbury's Nectar app

Sainsbury's has updated its Nectar app to let you 'lock' your spending and stop criminals stealing your points. It comes after the financial website This Is Money revealed that 12.5 million points worth nearly £63,000 had been stolen from its readers (www.snipca.com/53886).

First, update the app on your phone or install it from the relevant app store (Android www.snipca.com/53884; iOS www.snipca.com/53885). Log into your account, then click Settings followed by 'Lock or unlock spending'. Finally, slide the button from Unlocked to Locked (see screenshot).

Your points will show as zero when locked, but you can unlock them at any time. You'll still collect points and get discounts and offers while your points are locked. Only the person who set up the Nectar account will be able to lock it. If you have any problems ring the Nectar helpline (0344 811 0811) or use its live chat: www.snipca.com/53887.


Lock or unlock spending
Your spending is locked
Secure your Nectar points by locking spending. Unlock at any time to start spending again.
Unlock
Locked
How spend locking works
Lock spending
You can't spend points when they are locked:

ScamWatch

Readers warn readers

'Winter Fuel Payment' text

Computeractive has warned us recently that scammers will be trying to trick us with messages about claiming the Winter Fuel Payment. I got a strange text from something called the Subsidy Payment Centre reminding me I hadn't applied for my £300. It was sent to a "group chat" with eight other people, though I had no idea who they were. I didn't recognise the numbers. The link in the message began with grco.de, which is a giveaway – '.de' is a German suffix. The message ended with 'The Benefit Delivery Centre wishes you all the best'. How ludicrous!

Mick Rowe

Warn your fellow readers about scams at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

Sky's price rise is good for consumers

This might be an unpopular opinion, but it's healthy for consumers that Sky is sticking with percentage price increases, even if 6.2 per cent will be too high for many (Issue 704, page 8). Its policy contrasts with providers who are obeying Ofcom's rules to implement rises in 'pounds and pence', which means customers now have more choice.

If you want the security of a fixed-price increase then you can move to BT, TalkTalk, Virgin and others. But if you think that leads to bigger increases than when rises were linked to inflation, you can take a punt with Sky's approach. You can then cancel within 30 days if you don't like it.

One thing's for sure: the cost of TV and broadband will continue to rise above inflation simply because we're all so hooked on streaming and social media. We need this stuff, and providers know they can charge more and more.

Jonathan Edge

I quit Netflix because there's nothing to watch

It's not the recent Netflix price rise that prompted me to quit the service (Issue 704, page 9), but the fact that the ratio of bad shows to good is something like 1:100. It's so hard to find anything worth watching – a real case of quantity over quality. There's nothing that made TV worth watching in the 1970s and 1980s, like sitcoms, chat shows, quiz shows and light entertainment.

The BBC's content has undoubtedly deteriorated in the past few decades. Shows that were once unmissable are now awful (*Doctor Who* springs to mind). But it has a better mix than Netflix, and being 79 I'm conditioned to watching TV on a schedule rather than on demand. It feels more natural. I wish we could go back to the days when we all watched the same programmes at the same time.

Paul Leslie

Boom time for VPNs when porn sites check age

Carlos Nicoya is right to be sceptical about the effectiveness of forcing porn sites to prove users are over 18 (Issue 704, Letters). As he states, people will simply use VPNs to beat the block.

Just look at what's happened in the US. On 1 January, Florida enacted a similar law. Pornhub, the world's biggest porn site, decided to ignore the law and instead blocked access in Florida. Within weeks the use of VPNs in Florida had increased by 1,150 per cent. This was driven by only one thing, and it wasn't a desire to watch UK TV. Exactly the same has happened in other US states that have forced age checks: Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Utah.

That doesn't mean introducing age checks is the wrong thing to do. But we shouldn't pretend it's going to have much effect. Installing and operating a VPN is easy. It'll be boom time for VPNs when the age block comes in.

Rick Barrett

I'm leaving Microsoft 365 over ridiculous price rise

I've been a Microsoft 365 subscriber for a couple of years, happily paying a monthly fee of £5.99. But I recently received an email from Microsoft saying my fee will increase to £8.49 a month. Am I the only one who thinks this is ridiculous? I know it doesn't sound like much, but it feels like Microsoft is holding us to ransom as my Windows PC uses OneDrive and the Office suite.

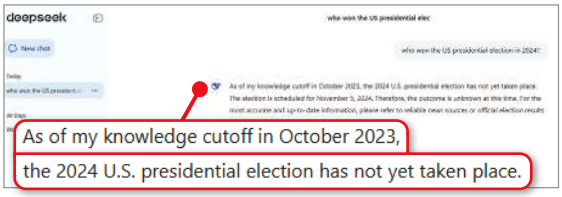
I'm going to stop using Microsoft 365 and switch to LibreOffice instead. I'm also going to switch from OneDrive to Dropbox. To secure my sensitive files I'll use the open-source program Cryptomator (https://cryptomator.org). Hopefully others will follow suit.

Jack Lewington

CA SAYS We were surprised also by the size of the increase – it's 42 per cent! Many other Microsoft 365 users must be thinking the same as Jack and considering cheaper or free alternatives. We explain your options on page 60.

DeepSeek couldn't even tell me that Trump won

In all this fuss over DeepSeek (Issue 703, page 49), nothing I've read has mentioned that its database only goes up to October 2023, so it can produce no helpful information based on more recent events. As an example, I asked it who won the 2024 US election. It told me: "As of my knowledge cutoff in



What's the Issue...?

I'm worried that my phone company has recycled my old number. When did you explain the risks of this?

Dawn Archer

CA SAYS In Issue 696, page 60.

I recall you mentioning how to use VPNs to avoid rip-off prices in the UK, but in which feature?

Simon Graham

CA SAYS That was on page 56 of Issue 692's Cover Feature on VPNs.

When did you reveal the best AI tools for editing photos?

Roger Fuller

CA SAYS In Issue 688, page 51. Read it and the features above on our Back Issue CD: www.snipca.com/53433.

Computeractive is a member of the IPSO (Independent Press Standards Organisation) which regulates the UK print and digital news industry. We abide by the Editors' Code of Practice and are committed to upholding the highest standards of journalism. If you think that we have not met those standards and want to make a complaint, please contact **legal@futurenet.com**

If we are unable to resolve your complaint, or if you would like more information about IPSO or the Editors' Code, contact IPSO on 0300 123 2220 or visit www.ipso.co.uk

October 2023, the 2024 U.S. presidential election has not yet taken place (pictured below left). The election is scheduled for November 5, 2024. Therefore, I cannot provide information on the outcome."

It can't even access the web to look up stuff. That means it's totally dependent on what it last hoovered up in 2023. To my way of thinking this is next to useless.

On the other hand, ChatGPT not only told me who won the election, but has been able to help me choose my next PC, pulling up current prices and reviews and making its own highly useful evaluations. Knockout winner.

Tony Allaway

CA SAYS **A few days after Tony emailed us we asked DeepSeek the same question. It said its 'knowledge cutoff' was now July 2024, which is more up to date but still meant it couldn't tell us who won the US Presidential election last year. But nor did it know about events that happened *before* July.**

It came up blank when we asked both who won the English Premier League and Eurovision in May 2024 (Manchester City and Switzerland). It didn't even know who won the Australian tennis open or the American Football Superbowl, both of which happened in January 2024.

There's still a lot we don't know about DeepSeek, particularly how it handles your data. Even if it did have a strict privacy policy, there's simply no reason to use it when rival US-based chatbots are so much better, namely ChatGPT (see page 44), Google Gemini (page 35) and Elon Musk's Grok (page 49).

Serif WebPlus is better than Xara

We read in Issue 703 (page 41) that Peter Baker recommends Xara Web Designer+ (www.snipca.com/53536) for publishing websites. Unfortunately, it's probably the last web-design program you can still get on a disc. We started using it some years ago when Serif decided to axe its superb stable of programs to chase Adobe customers. Compared to Serif WebPlus, we found Xara almost impossible to use.

Things were no better after purchasing the overpriced manual. Its index was nearly useless and Xara uses weird names for simple tasks, making it impossible to track down information. After a few years the program refused to transfer to our new Windows 11 computer so we abandoned it. Amazingly, we can still keep installing an old version of Serif's PagePlus on to new computers running Windows 11, without any trouble at all.

John and Jackie Paddison

Keep power and data cables two inches apart

In reply to Eric Tanner's tip on keeping power and data cables 12 inches apart (Issue 702 page 41), before retiring I used to carry out pre-connection inspections for BT on business internal telecom installations. All internal wiring and earth loop testing had to be inspected and tested before connection was allowed to BT's external lines.

This procedure involved following the British Standards (BS 6701) regulation. Any telecoms data cables running near electric cables (less than 300v AC) had to have a minimum distance of 50mm (two inches) to avoid any interference. If this regulation was not followed, the inspection would fail and the business would have to fix the problem.

There have been a few amendments to BS 6701 over the years, but it's safe to say that a minimum of two inches between data and electric cables within houses should be sufficient to avoid any interference.

Paul Croft

STAR LETTER

Council should let Howells dig for Bitcoin – but demand more money

In Issue 704 (page 8) you asked whether we sympathise with James Howells (pictured), who chucked away £620m worth of Bitcoin and now wants permission to search for it on a landfill site. Well, no, I don't sympathise with him. He caused his own misfortune. But I also think what's the worst that could happen if he did search for it?

I think Newport City Council should have been a bit smarter in its strategy. Back in 2021, Howells said he'd give 25 per cent of the proceeds of selling the Bitcoin to the council. At the time that would have given them around £50m. The value of Bitcoin has risen so sharply since that his 25-per-cent offer equates to about £150m. That could fund a lot of local services.

But the council should realise how desperate Howells is and demand a higher proportion of the proceeds – at least 75 per cent. Howells won't be happy with that, but he'd still become a multi-millionaire. The council should also demand that Howells funds the search himself, but that it's tightly regulated by officials.

One objection from the council – that it would encourage other people to follow suit – is laughable. How many people have thrown away hard drives stuffed with a Bitcoin fortune? His search would generate huge public interest, but it's hardly going to prompt copycat searches. Before starting, the council should give him a strict deadline, and get him to legally declare he'll drop the case should he not find his legendary drive. That would then be the end of it.

I'd be amazed if he managed to locate it, but Howells could at least take comfort that his efforts have given us a new modern saying to replace 'needle in a haystack'!

Jim Pinnock

The **Star Letter** writer wins a **Computeractive** mug!

Consumeractive

We stand up for your legal rights

Can Zoom refuse refund for unwanted subscription renewal?

LEAD CASE

Q My girlfriend signed up to the video-chat service Zoom (www.zoom.com), which has now taken an automatic subscription renewal. She hasn't used the service for most of the past year and will have no need for it in the future. However, she's finding it impossible to get a refund from Zoom. Isn't Zoom bound by UK consumer law? If so, surely it must refund her. She paid using PayPal.

Vincent Hampstead

A Zoom Communications is based in California, but like any company that offers services here it's bound by UK law. That means under the Consumer Contract Regulations Vincent's girlfriend had 14 days to cancel her renewed subscription, as long as she hadn't used Zoom in any way.

But what counts as 'using'? This is often hard to define, but in the case of renewing Zoom for a second year we'd argue it means actually making a video call through the software, not merely opening or updating it. Zoom would have to prove that she did this during those 14 days to refuse a refund.

When you first subscribe, 'using' a service or program is sometimes defined as downloading it – even if you do nothing meaningful with it. Every program is different, though, so check with the developer if you think there's a chance you'll seek a refund. And don't forget to check whether they offer a free trial.

We'll chase PayPal and Zoom for a refund. Meanwhile, Vincent's girlfriend should ask her bank for a chargeback, though this might be complicated by the payment having come through PayPal. She should check whether Zoom sent her an advance email/text about the renewal. If not, it must refund her, no matter when she cancelled.

CASE ONGOING

Is the customer responsible for safe returns?

Q Before Christmas, a relative purchased a few jumpers online from a well-known retailer. They kept some of these, but sent most back because they didn't fit. However, they received a refund for only *one* jumper. Is it up to customers to prove they've returned items?

Geoff Burgess

A Yes, when returning unwanted items customers must prove an item has been sent back. To cover yourself we always advise taking photos of the item you're returning and measure the weight of the parcel. You should also consider paying for insurance.

The Consumer Rights Act says customers shouldn't be out of pocket if they're returning faulty goods. If you do pay to return faulty items, you can ask the retailer to refund you any delivery and insurance cost. Many retailers will pick up faulty goods themselves, without you needing to pay, so always check this first.

Thankfully, Geoff has got his money back after asking his bank for a chargeback, which reverses the payment. Hopefully, the retailer won't challenge this.

CASE CLOSED

CASE UPDATE

Lidl says coupons are 'non-refundable' but offers help

Lidl has suggested it will refund Jenny Beady after the £11.99 lamp she bought, partly with a £10 coupon, turned out to have a faulty USB charger (see Issue 704).

If Jenny had paid in full with cash, Lidl would have had no choice but to refund her. But legally coupons are an 'invitation to treat', which means a retailer can refuse to accept them unless by doing so it's in breach of unfair trading regulations.

Lidl initially offered Jenny a £3 refund, which is actually *more* than it had to. It was obliged to give her only £1.99 – the difference between the coupon and what she paid.

The company told us its coupons are non-refundable as laid out in its terms and conditions because they hold "no monetary value". This is because it was a coupon Jenny won in a competition, not a voucher she paid for or was given as a present.

However, it added that because the lamp was faulty Jenny should contact its customer-service team for help (020 3966 5566). We expect it will be more helpful than the store Jenny visited soon after realising the lamp didn't work.

This sounds promising and we've advised Jenny to do this. We've also asked Trading Standards for more information on customers' rights when coupons are used successfully but the goods turn out to be faulty and can't be replaced.

Why won't Evri refund me for broken QR codes?

Q I run auctions in aid of rescue animal shelters, and at the beginning of February I tried to post around 36 parcels to various winners. I use the courier Evri normally and paid £181.70, but because of a technical glitch I was unable to generate the QR codes I needed to scan to get the parcels delivered. In the end, I used another courier and sought a refund from Evri. It sent me refunds for four parcels, but I'm still owed over £160 and Evri isn't responding to my emails or calls. What are my rights?

Amanda Checklin

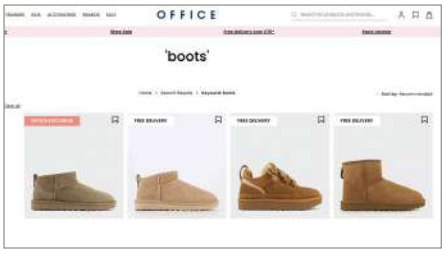
A Under the Consumer Contract Regulations customers can cancel contracts made online within 14 days, as long as they've not used the service. So, because Amanda was unable to scan the QR codes, she didn't send the parcels and therefore didn't use the service. This means she's entitled to a full refund from Evri, as we'll make clear to the company. We'll also ask why it's only been able to refund four payments.

If more than 14 days had passed and the QR codes still weren't working, Amanda could have claimed Evri had breached its contract under the Consumer Rights Act. This protects customers if a company can't provide the service they paid for.

CASE ONGOING

Can Office refuse a refund because I used Royal Mail?

Q I bought a £140 pair of boots from Office's website (www.office.co.uk, pictured), but when they arrived they didn't fit. I returned them using Royal Mail tracking, but Office is refusing a refund for two reasons: I didn't use its preferred courier service and they claim the boots never arrived. Can you help?



Kirsty Springer

A We'll do our best because Office can't dictate which courier you use to return goods. Retailers can recommend you use a particular courier, but you can refuse this and use your own. If you do so, they're not allowed to reject the delivery.

We checked Office's terms for returning items (www.snipca.com/53893) and we can't see where it says customers should use a specific courier. If customers are being told this, the company must investigate immediately. We'll explain this to Office.

If you agree to using a retailer's approved courier, make sure you ask whether there's a cost. They're allowed to impose a charge for returning unwanted goods, such as clothes that don't fit, but not if they're faulty. However, any charges have to be in line with prices offered by other couriers.

As for Office claiming the boots never arrived, Kirsty has signed proof from Royal Mail that they did. We'll ask Office whether the boots may have gone missing since being delivered. If so, that's not Kirsty's problem, and doesn't invalidate her right to a refund.

CASE ONGOING

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

Palicomp sent new power supply unit within 24 hours

I've been using Palicomp computers for about 15 years and have never been let down by its customer service, which I can't say about higher-profile companies like Dell and Lenovo.

Computers are complicated machines so I accept things occasionally go wrong. Ten days after my most recent Palicomp PC arrived the power supply unit (PSU) stopped working. I emailed the company about it on Friday lunchtime, expecting a replacement the following week. But they responded within minutes asking me to check a few things. Nothing worked, so they said they'd send a replacement. I was amazed to be disturbed while eating my breakfast the following morning with a parcel containing a new PSU.

In all, it was less than 24 hours between my first email and the PSU arriving. They gave me a pre-paid label to send the dead PSU back by courier. Such amazing service.

John Williams

Has a company impressed you with its customer service? Please let us know: editor@computeractive.co.uk

Contact
Palicomp

- **Email** support@palicomp.co.uk
- **Phone** 01270 898 078

Grow Your Family Tree

If your ancestors ran into trouble with the law, follow **Richard Holt's** advice to...

Search criminal records

Poverty was a major problem in the 19th Century and lots of people turned to crime as a way of feeding their families and making ends meet. As a result, one of the most common crimes was theft, otherwise known as larceny. Conditions in prisons were generally better than the workhouse, and if caught for petty crimes our ancestors would at least be housed and guaranteed regular meals.

Browse Criminal Registers

One of the key sources for finding criminal ancestors in England and Wales are the Criminal Registers that were kept by the Home Office. These list everyone in the prison system who were awaiting trial by jury at Quarter Sessions and Assizes, and therefore includes those who were acquitted as well as found guilty.

The registers are arranged alphabetically by county and are held by The National Archives. The registers for Middlesex from 1791-1849 are found in the HO 26 collection, while those for other counties for the years 1805-1892 (including Middlesex from 1850) are in HO 27.

You can search the indexes for free on Ancestry (www.snipca.com/53859), but you'll need a subscription to see images of the registers' pages. Findmypast subscribers will find the registers in the 'England & Wales, Crime, Prisons & Punishment, 1770-1935' collection (www.snipca.com/53860).

Richard found on Ancestry that his ancestor Isaac Brooks was sentenced to transportation to Australia in 1843

My family tree has many links to the Brooks family of Bledlow Ridge, Buckinghamshire. They were extremely poor and notorious for crimes such as poaching and trespass. I searched Ancestry's records for 'Brooks' and 'Buckinghamshire, England' and found my ancestor Isaac Brooks mentioned three times.

On 30 June 1840, Isaac was tried for 'robbery with violence', but was found not guilty. Then on 8 March 1842 he was convicted of larceny and imprisoned for a year. Finally, Isaac was sentenced to 10 years transportation to Australia for larceny on 17 October 1843 (see screenshot left).

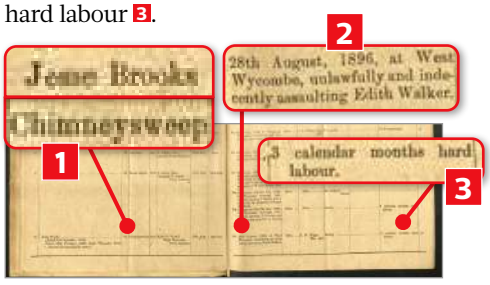
Search Calendars of Prisoners

Another major source is the After-Trial Calendars of Prisoners, which are printed lists of convicted prisoners that were tried at Quarter Sessions and Assizes courts. They are held by the National Archives in the HO 140 collection and cover 1868-1971.

Records for the Central Criminal Court between 1855 and 1949 are in the CRIM 9 collection. These include information not found in the Criminal Registers, such as details of previous convictions.

Ancestry subscribers can access the records in CRIM 9 (1855-1931, www.snipca.com/53861) and in HO 140 (1868-1929, www.snipca.com/53862), These records are also available to Findmypast subscribers in the 'Crime, Prisons & Punishment' collection mentioned above.

Searching again for the Brooks family, I saw that my ancestor Jesse Brooks, a chimney sweep (1 in our screenshot below), was convicted on 19 October 1896 for assaulting Edith Walker at West Wycombe, Buckinghamshire 2. He received a sentence of three months hard labour 3.



Jesse Brooks was sentenced to three months hard labour for assault in 1896

Your Genealogy Problems Solved

My father was captured as a prisoner of war during World War 2, while his much older brother was captured during World War 1. I remember as a child how they would compare experiences. Now that I'm compiling my family tree, where would I find information relating to their years as POWs?

Den Richardson

For both wars, search Findmypast's 'Prisoners Of War 1715-1945' collection (www.snipca.com/53867). You'll need to pay for a subscription to see the records. Ancestry separates its records into WW1 (www.snipca.com/53869) and WW2 (www.snipca.com/53870) – again, you'll need a subscription. If you're not a member of either, search the free WW1 records from the International Committee of the Red Cross (https://grandeguerre.icrc.org).

Have a genealogy question for Richard? Email letters@computeractive.co.uk with 'Grow Your Family Tree' in the subject line.

Next issue: Add important events to your family tree

Printerland.co.uk

Unbeatable
Prices and Offers on our Best Selling Printers

PC PRO TECHNOLOGY EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2024
BEST ONLINE RETAILER

Xerox B225
A4 Mono Laser MFP

★★★★★

- Free 3 Year On-Site Warranty
- Ships with 1.2K Black Toner Cartridge

Print/Scan/Copy
Up to 2,400 dpi Print
USB, Network, Wireless & Wi-Fi Direct
Up to 34ppm Mono Print Speed

Business Price
Only £117.42 ex VAT
£140.90 inc VAT @ 20%

Epson EcoTank ET-2862
A4 Colour Inkjet MFP

★★★★★

- £40 Cashback & Free Gift
- Free 5 Year Warranty
- Ships with 3 Years of Ink*

Print/Scan/Copy
Up to 5,760 x 1,440 dpi Print
Up to 33ppm Print Speeds
USB, Wireless & Wi-Fi Direct

Business Price
From £139.00 ex VAT
£166.80 inc VAT @ 20%

Canon i-SENSYS MF752Cdw
A4 Colour Laser MFP

★★★★★

- £60 Cashback
- Free 3 Year Warranty
- Ships with 2K Black & 1.2K CMY Toner

Print/Scan/Copy
Up to 1,200 x 1,200 dpi Print
USB, Network, Wireless & Wi-Fi Direct
Up to 33ppm Colour & Mono Print

Business Price
Only £303.25 ex VAT
£363.90 inc VAT @ 20%

For more information on products at Printerland, call **0800 840 1992** or e-mail us using **sales@printerland.co.uk**

*Terms and conditions apply. Call us or see our website for full details and for other promotions. E&OE. Prices are exclusive of VAT and were correct at time of going to press. Please check our website for the latest prices.

Best Free Software

Robert Irvine recommends new programs that won't cost you a thing

VIDEO DOWNLOADER

4K Video Downloader Plus 25

www.snipca.com/53999
What you need: Windows 10 or 11, macOS or Linux

Downloading videos from streaming services typically means either paying for a subscription or using a third-party tool, many of which are stuffed with ads and trackers. 4K Video Downloader Plus isn't perfect – it's freemium, so some features are restricted to its paid-for plans – but it's the easiest way to save videos to your desktop to watch offline.

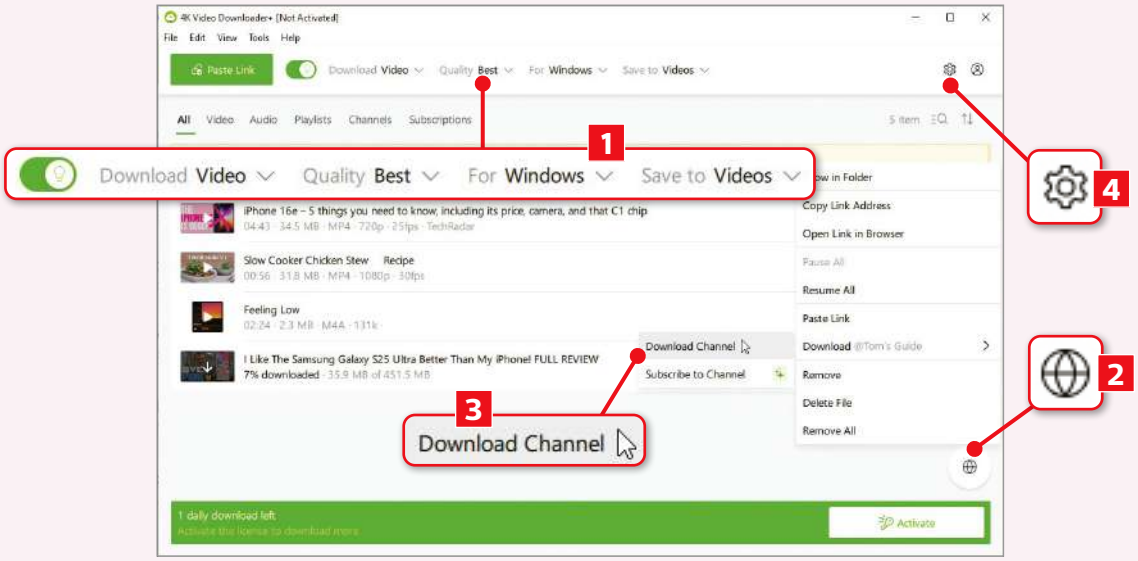
It's a significant upgrade over its predecessor, 4K Video Downloader (without the 'plus'), which was discontinued on 1 February. A built-in browser lets you search for videos and music on popular services including YouTube, Dailymotion, SoundCloud, Facebook and TikTok, and download them with one click. Alternatively, paste a video or audio link from your standard browser to download it instantly. You can also save YouTube playlists and channels.

The program's handy Smart Mode saves you having to configure download settings every time you download a video. Specify your preferred quality (resolution and frame rate), format and download folder, and it will apply your preferences to every video you download.

4K Video Downloader Plus 25 (the '25' indicates the year not the version number) makes it easier to download every video from a YouTube channel. Click the three-dot icon next to a download and choose Download then Download Channel. It also displays larger thumbnail images of videos when browsing channels and playlists – click the Enlarge button in the top-right corner of the download window. Note that this only works when Smart Mode is switched off.

The updated program improves the speed and reliability of downloads, reducing the number of errors, and works better with media players.

4K Video Downloader Plus limits you to downloading 10 videos a day, either individually or from a playlist, but only five from a channel, and only one at a time. For unlimited downloads (up to three simultaneously), subscribe to the Lite plan for £18 a year or buy the Personal version for £24.



1 The Smart Mode in 4K Video Downloader Plus applies your download preferences to every video and audio file you save. Use the dropdown menus to select your preferred format, quality and download folder, and the device you play content on.

2 Click the globe icon in the bottom-right to switch to the program's browser. This lets you browse and search for videos to download on services including YouTube, Dailymotion and TikTok. Sign into your account with a service to access your playlists.

3 You can now download all the videos from a YouTube channel, by clicking the three-dot icon and choosing Download then Download Channel. However, the free version of the program limits you to saving the first five videos from the channel.

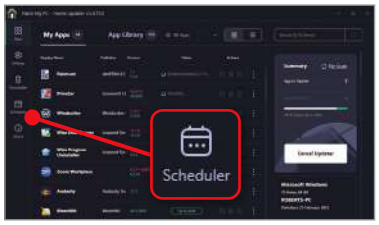
4 Click the Preferences cog to customise how 4K Video Downloader Plus works. You can adjust its download speed, have it display notifications when downloads are complete and stop the program running in the background when you close it.

SOFTWARE UPDATER

Patch My PC Home Updater 5.0.11.0

www.snipca.com/53975

What you need: Windows 10 or 11



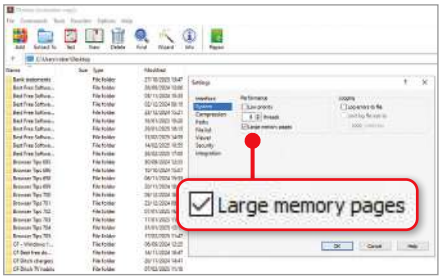
Patch My PC was the focus of our 'Never miss another software update' Cover Feature in Issue 697 (buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/53976). Now it's received an update of its own to patch some bugs and add support for even more programs. Most notably, Patch My PC has fixed a problem that caused software to show as 'Updating' even after it had updated. It has also improved its Scheduler (see screenshot) to make it better at checking for and installing new versions of programs at your preferred time and frequency. New additions to Patch My PC's library of supported software include video editor LosslessCut, AI-powered photo-repair tool Wise ImageX and gaming service Nvidia GeForce Now. It has dropped support for download manager EagleGet and Google's discontinued 'Backup and Sync' tool.

FILE COMPRESSION TOOL

WinRAR 7.10

www.snipca.com/53984

What you need: Windows 10 or 11



WinRAR has been around for 30 years and is no longer an essential compression tool – especially now that Windows 11 can open RAR archives. But the latest version proves there's life in the old program yet by making some welcome changes. WinRAR's Settings box, which you access through its Options menu, has been redesigned to display categories in an easier-to-navigate left-hand menu rather than tabs across the top. It has also split the Interface and System settings into separate sections, and added a long awaited dark mode to the former. Another new option boosts compression speed when you pack big files into RAR or ZIP archives. Select 'System' and tick the box 'Large memory pages' (see screenshot). WinRAR has now dropped its 32bit version, but retains its 40-day 'free trial', which famously never ends.

SHOULD I PAY FOR...?

Choose the right version of software

File Pilot

www.snipca.com/53987

Price: £32 **Free trial:** Free while in beta

What you need: Windows 7, 8.1, 10 or 11

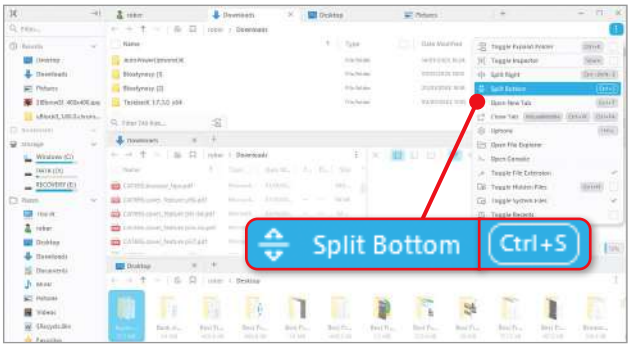
File Pilot is a new alternative to File Explorer that promises to make finding, inspecting and managing files feel like "second nature". It's currently in beta and free to use, but will cost £40 once officially released (£32 if you buy a licence now).

Our first impression on running File Pilot is that it's incredibly lightweight and fast, launching instantly. Much as we love the file manager Files (www.snipca.com/53988), it can be slow to load. Less promising was that File Pilot froze when we right-clicked a folder, and displayed a 'fatal exception' error message.

Once the program restarted (and we'd resolved not to right-click any folders), we explored its interface and features. Like Files, it offers tabbed browsing, so you can switch easily between multiple folders and drives, and a split-screen view that displays them side by side – or horizontally (split bottom) if you prefer (see screenshot).

We particularly like the Inspector tool, which shows large previews of image files in a sidebar when you press the Spacebar. This saves you having to open a separate image viewer, and you can quickly close the sidebar by pressing Space again.

Other useful options let you show hidden and system files, switch between list, details and tile view, customise the layout's colour, font and spacing, and allow files to be opened with a single click.



OUR VERDICT: Don't pay for it

File Pilot's speed and customisability are very impressive, but its features don't justify its high licence price, especially at the beta stage when it clearly still has bugs. Files has more options and is free to download – even its paid-for Microsoft Store app only costs £7.49.

What should I download?

We advise you which software and apps to use

What's the best alternative to PaintShop Pro?

Q Many of the features I used to like in PaintShop Pro have vanished. I have loads of older photos I want to copy to my PC and improve. Is there any other similar program I can buy? I can afford a one-off payment, but not a yearly subscription.

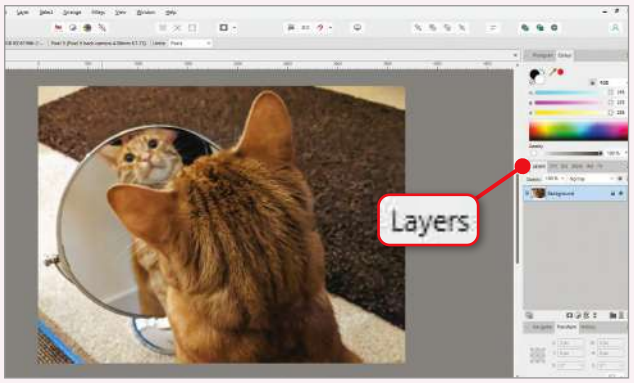
Ann Casey

A We're big fans of Serif's Affinity Photo 2 (www.snipca.com/53855), which is packed with professional image-editing tools and costs a very reasonable £68 for Windows or Mac, or £18 for iPad. You can combine it with Designer (a vector-graphics editor) and Publisher (for laying out documents) for £160. All updates to the version 2 programs are free, so you won't need to spend anything extra unless you decide to upgrade to version 3.

Among its many clever tools, we love the option to add adjustments to layers rather than applying them directly to the image. This makes it easy to adjust the strength of each one by dragging a slider, and lets you quickly remove them to undo a change if you're not happy with the result.

As well as its own file format, it can work with common camera formats like JPEG, PNGs generated by most screenshot programs, and even Photoshop documents if you have any.

If you'd like to give it a try before committing any money, you can download a free trial from the Microsoft Store (www.snipca.com/53851) or Serif's site (www.snipca.com/53856).



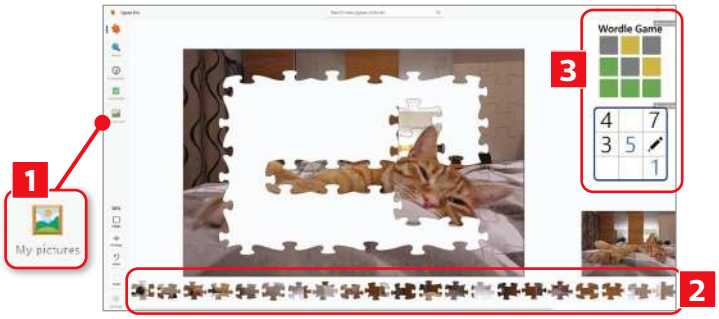
How do I tag my photos?

Q In Windows 7, I was able to copy all my photos to my PC and then tag all my friends and family in them. However, it appears I can't do this in Windows 10 or 11. Is there a photo program that lets me do this – and ideally also recognise my old tags?

Chris Ellis

A Darktable (www.darktable.org) is your best bet. Import your images, then click 'tagging' on the right. Select your images, then click in the box below 'attach'. Next, type your tag, then click 'new' at the bottom of that box. It's even easier to apply an existing tag to a new image. Select the image, then double-click the tag in the right-hand sidebar. You can filter the displayed images to just those that match a particular tag by right-clicking that tag and selecting 'go to tag collection' (see screenshot).

Can I turn photos into jigsaws?



Q I want a free program that turns any image on my Windows 11 PC into a jigsaw puzzle. I know I can do this online, but I don't want to upload private photos to the internet.

Dennis Cole

A Try Jigsaw Pro from the Microsoft Store. There's a free version with adverts (www.snipca.com/53847) and one without ads for £10.49 (www.snipca.com/53848). Click 'My pictures' (1 in our screenshot) followed by 'Import your own photo'. Select it then choose how many jigsaw pieces you want. Click Start, then drag the pieces from the bottom row 2 into the space above. Note the advert top right 3.

Named & Shamed

Keumars Afifi-Sabet puts the boot into tech villains, jargon-spouting companies and software trying to trick you

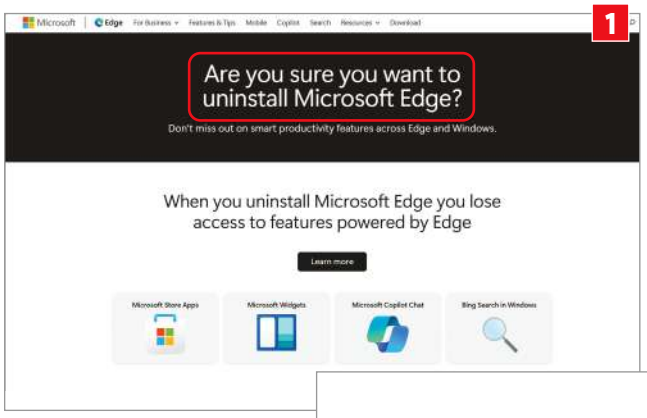
SOFTWARE WARNING!

Microsoft's 'don't uninstall' guide to uninstalling Edge

If at any time recently you've searched for advice on uninstalling Edge, you might have seen a guide from Microsoft promising exactly that. And you might have clicked it, assuming quite reasonably that Microsoft would know the best way to remove its own browser. But that would be forgetting the company's almost pathological desire to keep you using Edge instead of Chrome.

The company's instructions online were more concerned with questioning your judgement. As screenshot 1 shows, it asked 'Are you sure you want to uninstall Microsoft Edge?'. It also claimed you'll miss out on "features powered by Edge", with images below suggesting these include the Microsoft Store and widgets. Well, they might work a tad less smoothly, but you'll hardly notice the difference.

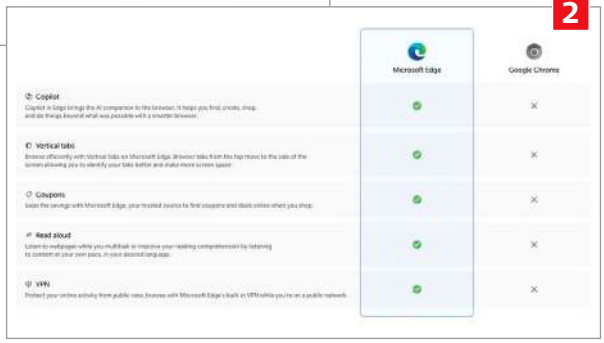
Click 'Learn more' and Microsoft shows you a table comparing Edge with Chrome 2 in another attempt to change your mind. It's not the first time Microsoft has acted like a jilted lover desperately trying to stop you shacking up with Google.


Are you sure you want to uninstall Microsoft Edge?
Don't miss out on smart productivity features across Edge and Windows.
When you uninstall Microsoft Edge you lose access to features powered by Edge
Learn more

1

Credit: Neowin

Yes, Microsoft, I'm quite sure I want to uninstall Edge – but thanks for asking



2

Microsoft helpfully points out what Edge has that Chrome doesn't

I'm not anti-Edge. In fact, I think it's improved a lot recently. But I can't bear Microsoft's pitiful marketing tricks. It has now removed the guide following a backlash. For genuine advice on removing Edge read Issue 703's Cover Feature 'Break Windows' worst rules'. You can buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/53843.

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?

WHAT THEY SAY

Opera on its new browser Air
www.snipca.com/53839

"This new browser integrates calming, research-based mindfulness features such as breathing exercises, binaural beats, and inspiring positive quotes; they're embedded into your browser so you can do mindfulness exercises without disrupting your daily routine. Additionally, a minimalist Scandinavian design and frosted glass UI... make Opera Air a browser that not just makes you feel good, but looks good too."

WHAT THEY MEAN

We're mindful this sounds like total baloney.

KEUMARS' VILLAINS OF THE FORTNIGHT

Foysal Habib and Abu Sufian

Credit: Google Street View

If you've ever been duped by fake cables, batteries, earphones or adapters on eBay, they may have been sent from the Sundarban internet cafe in Tower Hamlets, London (pictured). That's where Abu Sufian (50) and Foysal Habib (44) ran their criminal enterprise before being caught by trading standards officials.

A judge described the operation as "sophisticated" and said its leader Sufian would have been jailed had he not changed his plea to guilty. He was sentenced to nine months, suspended for two years, while Habib got six months, also suspended for two years.

"Counterfeit electrical chargers and batteries have been linked to serious injuries and fires," said Tower Hamlets councillor Shafi Ahmed. He's right. Never be tempted by such items online unless you're convinced the seller is legitimate.

MINI PC | **£261** from Chuwi www.snipca.com/53972

Chuwi UBox AMD Ryzen 5 6600H

Bite-size beauty

There's a mini PC for every need and budget, whether you want to splash out on a powerful model such as our current favourite, the Geekom A8 (£719 from Geekom at www.snipca.com/51157, tested in Issue 689) or spend less on a more modest computer. The Chuwi UBox falls firmly at the affordable end of the spectrum, with an attractive price of £261.

> "A stylish, affordable mini PC that's perfect for office tasks and web browsing"

This gets you a stylish PC in a white plastic case that has been designed with a little more thought than we're used to seeing in mini PCs. The slanted vents along each side look smart while keeping the components cool, and although the case is made of plastic, it doesn't feel flimsy.

Internally the Chuwi UBox is built around an AMD Ryzen 5 6600H processor, with 16GB of RAM and 512GB of SSD storage. The processor is a few generations behind AMD's current best, but that's what we would expect in such an affordable computer. However, while we wouldn't recommend the UBox for playing the latest games or editing high-resolution videos, it's more than capable enough for running office software, answering emails and browsing the web.

It comes with Windows 11 Pro installed, which it ran perfectly well in our tests. Office software and web browsers also proved no obstacle, and when we pushed the UBox with some basic video-editing software, it was able to edit 1080p footage without too much difficuly. It slowed down considerably when we tried to edit a 4K video, though.

We saw similar results in our gaming tests, with casual games running well but more graphically complex titles slowing it right down. The most demanding games wouldn't run at all.

On the front of the case there are two USB 3.2 ports and a single USB-C port, which we were delighted to see supports the new USB 4.0 standard. This is the only USB-C port on the device, however, which is disappointing. At the back there's another USB 3.2 port and a USB 2.0 port for connecting a keyboard or mouse. As well as two ports for plugging in monitors – one HDMI and one DisplayPort – there are two 2.5Gb Ethernet ports, which is one too many for most people. We'd have preferred to see some additional USB ports instead. Wireless connectivity comes in the form of Wi-Fi 6 and Bluetooth 5.0.

While this is a perfectly good mini PC for those with modest computing demands, it's certainly possible to get a little more power without spending a lot more money. Chuwi doesn't offer any variations on the UBox with more memory and storage, but GMKtec's NucBox M6 is very similar, with the same processor but 32GB of RAM and 1TB of SSD storage. We tested the NucBox M6 in Issue 694, and you can buy it for $370 (around £290) from www.snipca.com/53974.

SPECIFICATIONS

Six-core AMD Ryzen 5 6600H processor • 16GB of memory • AMD Radeon 660M graphics • 512GB SSD • Wi-Fi 6 • Bluetooth 5.0 • 2x 2.5Gb Ethernet port • 1x HDMI port • 1x DisplayPort • 1x USB-C port • 3x USB 3.2 ports • 1x USB 2.0 ports • Windows 11 Pro • 57x131x128mm (HxWxD) • 650g • One-year warranty
www.snipca.com/53972

VERDICT One of the most affordable mini PCs around, though it's worth spending a bit more on a higher specification, if you can afford it

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Geekom A8 £719 Still our favourite mini PC, with better performance thanks to its more up-to-date processor

LAPTOP | **£449** from Very www.snipca.com/53866

HP Chromebook Plus 15.6

Net worker

HP has become the latest manufacturer to dive into the Chromebook Plus market with this big-screen 15.6in laptop. Chromebooks run ChromeOS so can't use Windows software, but they're ideal for running web-based tools in a browser window, such as Gmail, online office tools and web apps, such as online image editor Photopea (www.photopea.com). And this HP machine goes beyond the minimum Plus requirements.

> "ChromeOS laptop with vibrant screen and long-running battery"

On closer inspection, the high build quality reveals itself. The whole case feels solid, yet it's also quite light and thin for a device of this size. It's not as slim as some other Chromebooks or laptops, but given its 15.6in screen, it's relatively easy to carry around and travel with.

It's powered by an Intel Core i3-N305 processor, along with 8GB of RAM and a 256GB SSD. In testing it ran ChromeOS smoothly, even when we were multi-tasking, and we could stream 4K video with minimal buffering. Navigating ChromeOS and using its various interface features, such as window switching, is a largely seamless experience. It handles most online tools with ease.

We were impressed with the 15.6in IPS screen. It uses a 1080p resolution, which is appropriate for the size. The images are vibrant and colours are remarkably accurate without looking washed-out. It also offers decent viewing angles, though wasn't as bright as the AMOLED screen on our current favourite Chromebook – the Samsung Galaxy Chromebook (£599 from www.snipca.com/53868, reviewed in Issue 702).

The typing experience is something of a mixed bag. The keys feel comfortable, but the inclusion of a number pad means they're a little cramped. The trackpad, on the other hand, is a pleasure to use – very responsive and smooth when swiping. Battery life is also impressive – it ran for 10 hours 41 minutes in our video-playback test.

Its ports comprise two USB-C, one USB 3.0, a microSD card slot and headphone jack. Wireless connectivity is provided by Wi-Fi 6 and Bluetooth 5.3.

If you're prepared to pay £150 more, the Samsung Galaxy Chromebook gives you a faster processor, double the storage and an even better screen, which we think is well worth it. We have seen this HP model available at a reduced price (less than £300), so if you're looking for a bargain, it might be worth keeping an eye on.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core Intel Core i3-N305 processor • 8GB RAM • Intel UHD graphics • 15.6in 1920x1080-pixel IPS screen • 256GB SSD • 2x USB-C ports • 1x USB 3.0 port • MicroSD card reader • Wi-Fi 6 • Bluetooth 5.3 • ChromeOS • 19.8x363x242mm (HxWxD) • 1.73kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/53866

HOW WE TEST

Computeractive is owned by Future PLC, which employs a team of specialist technical reviewers. You'll often read references to our benchmark testing, which is a method of assessing products using the same criteria. For example, we test the speed of every PC and the battery life of every phone and tablet in exactly the same way. This makes our reviews authoritative, rigorous and accurate.

Future PLC also owns the magazines *Maximum PC*, *PC Pro* and *T3*, and the websites Laptop Mag (www.laptopmag.com), TechRadar (www.techradar.com) and Windows Central (www.windowscentral.com). This means we can test thousands of products before choosing the most relevant for *Computeractive*.

FAIR AND IMPARTIAL

Our writers follow strict guidelines to ensure the reviews are fair and impartial. The manufacturer has no involvement in our tests.

OUR AWARDS

We award every product that gets five stars our Buy It! stamp of approval. It means we were extremely impressed by the product, and we think you will be too.

Every product that gets a four-star review is given the Recommended award. We highly recommend these products, although they just fail to meet the high standard of our Buy It! winners.

PRICES

Our reviews contain a link to the best price we found online at the time of press.

VERDICT A classy Chromebook at a reasonable price, but it just falls short of rival models

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Samsung Galaxy Chromebook Plus 15.6in 5 £599 A more powerful Chromebook with a superior screen and double the storage

TABLET | **£499** from Oppo www.snipca.com/53892

Oppo Pad 3 Pro

Upsets the Apple cart

The Pad 3 Pro from Chinese manufacturer Oppo is a slim, premium Android tablet with a spacious 12.1in screen at a price that puts it in direct competition with our current favourite Android tablet – the Honor MagicPad2 (£499 from www.snipca.com/53150, reviewed in Issue 700). Picking between the two is tough, but we'll drill down into the differences and give you our verdict.

> "It offers a large, colourful screen with a customisable interface in a classy design"

For the sake of comparison, it's worth remembering that a similarly specified iPad – such as the smaller 11in iPad Air –would cost £100 more, with the larger 13in model coming in at £799. So by choosing Android you're certainly getting more screen for your money. Apple still leads the way with its iPadOS operating system, which remains a superior interface and is better supported by app developers.

But let's focus on the hardware for now, starting with the screen, which is a useful point of difference between the two Android tablets. The Pad 3 Pro measures 12.1in across the diagonal – marginally smaller than the MagicPad2. It has a decent resolution of 3000x2120 pixels, a nifty 144Hz refresh rate and a peak brightness level of 900cd/m². The MagicPad2 has a slightly lower resolution despite its larger screen, and doesn't go as bright, which might be a deal-breaker if you're planning to use it outside.

The build quality of the Pad 3 Pro is exceptional and, like an iPad, it feels solid and well constructed. The screen is surrounded by a metal bezel that wraps neatly around the edges of the device. It's thicker at 6.49mm (MagicPad2 is 5.8mm) and heavier, weighing 586g compared with 555g. Again, you probably wouldn't notice these differences without getting out a ruler and scales, but you may want to consider them if you tend to carry your tablet around with you.

Along the right-hand edge of the tablet (when in portrait mode) there's a magnetic charging point for a stylus, though at the time of writing neither the stylus or a promised keyboard case were available in the UK. That's another feather in the cap for the MagicPad2, which does come with a keyboard case and stylus at no extra cost.

One useful feature of the Pad 3 Pro is showing three apps on screen at once. The way you get the split screen up is a little fiddly, but it gets easier once you've followed the on-screen tutorial and used it a few times.

During testing, the Pad 3 Pro handled video streaming, intensive gaming, lengthy social-media sessions and video calls without any glitches. Even when multitasking with three apps open side by side, everything continued to run smoothly.

Oppo has added its own ColorOS 15 interface over the top of Android, which is colourful, easy to use and can be customised to suit your needs and tastes. If you like to tinker and tweak, there are plenty of options to play with in the Settings menu.

Where Pad 3 Pro definitely has the edge is that it doesn't come bogged down with loads of pre-loaded apps (though Netflix and WPS Office are present), whereas the MagicPad2 requires much more purging of bloatware. Battery life is pretty good, with the Pad 3 Pro providing two days of heavy usage from a single charge.

In conclusion, this is a good example of how Android tablets can compete with iPads, particularly if you're looking for a larger device for less money. However, it still lags behind the Honor MagicPad2, which has a better, larger screen and comes with a stylus and keyboard case.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core Qualcomm Snapdragon 8 Gen 3 processor • 12GB RAM • 256GB storage • 12.1in 3000x2120-pixel IPS screen • 13-megapixel rear camera • 8-megapixel front-facing camera • Wi-Fi 7 • Bluetooth 5.4 • ColorOS 14.1 • 195x269x6.5mm (HxWxD) • 586g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/53892

VERDICT An impressive Android tablet that's bigger than an iPad for less money and offers some nice features, but it's a tad too expensive for what you get compared with rivals

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Honor MagicPad2 £500 It has a slightly larger OLED screen (12.3in), is extremely fast and has18-hour battery life

SOLID-STATE DRIVE | **£190** from Scan www.snipca.com/53939

Corsair EX400U

Speed drive

This 64mm-square external SSD may look inconspicuous, but it's the first drive we've tested that's equipped with a super-fast USB 4.0 port. USB 4.0 offers theoretical top speeds of 40Gbps, which is twice what the fastest USB 3.2 Gen 2x2 drives can manage. The manufacturer says that in real-world use the EX400U can read data at up to 32Gbps and write at 28Gbps.

USB 4.0 ports and connectors are the same shape as USB-C, and because they're also backwards compatible, you could connect this drive to an older USB-C port that doesn't support USB 4.0. You won't benefit from the faster speeds unless you connect it to a proper USB 4.0 port, however.

> "With a new USB 4.0 port, this drive offers blistering speeds"

Another feature that makes this drive stand out is a MagSafe-compliant magnetic ring on the underside (pictured below). This has nothing to do with powering the device but instead lets you attach it to other objects, such as a laptop or desktop computer that has a magnet-friendly case.

We reviewed the 2TB version. As you might expect, it costs more than a typical 2TB USB 3.2 external drive, so it's not the best choice if you just want a little extra storage and don't care about transferring large quantities of data at high speeds.

To test its performance we connected the EX400U to a mini PC equipped with a USB 4.0 port and ran a series of benchmarking tests. We recorded top read speeds of 32.4Gbps and write speeds of 29Gbps, so the drive is actually a little faster than Corsair quoted.

For comparison, the 1TB Crucial X10 Pro USB 3.2 drive we tested in Issue 670 (£99.99 from www.snipca.com/47946) managed 16.5Gbps when reading and 14.7Gbps when writing data. So, in our tests at least, we can confirm that the new USB 4.0 interface delivers twice the speeds of USB 3.2.

The Corsair drive offers twice the performance and twice the storage of the Crucial X10 for less than double the price, which makes it seem good value in comparison. However, it doesn't quite keep up in terms of features. The X10 is tougher, with IP55 dust and water resistance, and comes with built-in hardware encryption, making it a better option if you need to carry sensitive information around with you.

SPECIFICATIONS

2TB external SSD (also available in 1TB and 4TB) • Top speed requires PC or laptop with USB 4.0 port • 12x64x64mm (HxWxD) • 190g • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/53939

VERDICT The fastest external storage device we've ever tested, but only if you have a USB 4.0 port to connect it to

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Crucial X10 Pro £100

Smaller capacity and slower speeds, but more affordable if you don't need the fastest drive

CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPECS

Bluetooth 6.0

What does it do?

Bluetooth allows two devices to transfer data to each other wirelessly when they're in close proximity. It links gadgets such as wireless headphones, speakers and smartwatches to phones, tablets and computers and is essential for clever technologies such as smart tags, which can help you track lost objects.

How does it work?

Bluetooth uses very low-powered radio waves in the 2.4GHz range, which is also used by Wi-Fi. Because the waves have very little power, they don't travel far. That's why Bluetooth devices must be near to each other to connect.

What are the specs?

Bluetooth 6.0 was announced towards the end of 2014, and is just starting to appear on new devices, such as the Xiaomi Poco X7 Pro (pictured, tested in Issue 704). Its most significant improvement is Channel Sounding, which helps Bluetooth 6.0 devices work out exactly how far away they are from each other, to an accuracy of around 1cm. This will make it much easier when using your phone to find your earbuds or keys, and will also improve the security of Bluetooth car keys.

The new standard also makes communications between devices more efficient. While it doesn't offer any increases in bandwidth, these efficiencies should allow devices to connect faster, speeding up processes such as transferring data from fitness bands to mobile apps, for example.

Can I change it later?

You can in desktop PCs and laptops by adding a new card or dongle, but not in mobile devices with Bluetooth built in.

VIDEO DOORBELL | **£100** from Tapo www.snipca.com/53924

Tapo D235 Wired & Battery Video Doorbell

Ringing endorsement

Tapo is a spin-off brand of Chinese networking manufacturer TP-Link, but it focuses on smart-home gadgets rather than routers and Wi-Fi extenders. We've previously reviewed its security cameras and smart plugs, but this is the first Tapo video doorbell we've tested. The D235 doesn't reinvent the wheel, but it does offer an excellent alternative to the leading brands in this field, with some great features at an affordable price.

> "Excellent features, easy setup and detailed video footage"

There are two ways to set it up – connect it to existing doorbell wiring or use the included rechargeable battery. You also get mounting brackets, a USB charging cable and wires for connecting the doorbell to an existing chime. Tapo claims the battery will last 210 days from a full charge, though that inevitably depends on how busy your doorstep gets. We didn't test it for that length of time, but the amount of battery drain we saw suggests that estimate is about right.

You also get a chime unit that plugs into a wall socket, so you don't need to have your phone with you to be notified of a visitor. All the doorbell's other features – including the setup, custom-detection zones, LED light strength, motion-detection sensitivity, and more – require you to use the Tapo smartphone app, which is neat and responsive.

The 2K five-megapixel video feed is great, offering plenty of detail. Night vision isn't the best we've seen, but it's fine, and the option to switch between infrared and full-colour modes (powered by the doorbell's LED) is very welcome.

The camera has a 180-degree horizontal and 140-degree vertical field of view, which packs in a lot of picture. There's also two-way audio, a siren, and the option to set up a voiced response for when you're not at home. Built-in AI lets the doorbell differentiate between people, pets, vehicles and packages, and sends you appropriate notifications depending on what it detects. Most rival systems do this remotely but charge a subscription fee. In our tests it worked well most of the time, but made occasional mistakes.

Best of all, these features are available without a subscription, as long as you insert a microSD card (not supplied) to store the footage. You can opt to store footage online too, with subscriptions starting from £2.49 a month.

SPECIFICATIONS
Wired or wireless installation • Built-in storage with microSD card (not supplied) • 2K video resolution • Rechargeable battery • 150x50x38mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/53924

VERDICT This video doorbell offers excellent features and built-in storage, meaning you won't need a subscription to get the most out of it

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Eufy Security Video Doorbell E340 £153 Our favourite doorbell, with a similar specification but a second camera that can watch over parcels while you're out

WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

Which laptop processor is best for my needs?

Q I am thinking of buying a new laptop and wanted your opinion on which processor I should get. I was considering either the AMD Ryzen 7 5825U, or the same chip I currently have (an Intel Core i7-8550U) – albeit the latest version. I currently have an Acer Aspire A615-51 laptop, which has only 4GB RAM.

Ronnie Williams

A Although the AMD Ryzen 7 5825U still shows up in laptops and mini PCs, it's now over three years old, so may not last as long as the seven-year-old Intel Core i7 chip in your current laptop has lasted.

The reason is when you bought your Acer laptop, its Core i7 processor was still relatively new, having arrived just the year before. We'd advise buying a laptop with a newer processor, assuming you can afford to do so.

If you're happy to stick with Acer, a laptop with a second-generation Core Ultra 7 processor, such as the Acer Swift 14 AI OLED (£1,300 from www.snipca.com/53927, pictured), should serve your needs well.

To keep the price down you could opt for a less powerful but still current processor, such as the Intel Core 7 in the Acer Aspire 17 (£850 from www.snipca.com/53926).

Do you need advice on what you should buy? Email us at letters@computeractive.co.uk

WIRED2FIRE

The UK's highest rated system builder!

Trustpilot ★★★★★

"The Best Compact Gaming PC We've Seen"

TIM DANTON, **PC PRO** FEBRUARY 2025

PC PRO A-LIST

WIRED2FIRE HAL 9000 Mini PC

CPU: AMD Ryzen 7 9700X 8-Core 5.5GHz
GPU: NVIDIA RTX 4070 Ti Super 16GB
RAM: 32GB DDR5 6000MTs
SSD: 2TB Kingston Fury Renegade M.2 NVME
CASE: Cooler Master NR200P V2

£1,899.99

Winner of PC Pro's A-List and Editor's Choice Awards, Our incredible small-format **HAL 9000** mini PC delivers flagship full-size PC gaming performance in a compact case, that easily fits into a cabin bag. Measuring just 18.5cm wide, 29cm high and 37cm deep, the HAL 9000 is fully configurable. Build your dream mini PC today!

Use code **PCPROQ125** to **Save £30** on any PC purchase

PC PRO A-LIST

Ultima WS PRO Home Office PC

CPU: AMD Ryzen 7 7700 8 Core 5.3GHz
GPU: Integrated AMD Radeon Graphics
RAM: 32GB DDR5 6000MTs
SSD: 1TB M.2 NVME Ultra-Fast SSD
CASE: Kolink Stronghold Tempered Glass

£959.99 inc VAT

R7X3D RTX 5080 Beast

CPU: AMD Ryzen 7 9800X3D 8 Core 5.2GHz
GPU: NVIDIA RTX 5080 16GB
RAM: 32GB DDR5 6000MTs
SSD: 2TB M.2 NVME Ultra-Fast SSD
CASE: Be Quiet! Light Base 600 LX

£2,799.99 inc VAT

email: **sales@wired2fire.co.uk** tel: **01306 882 211** **www.wired2fire.co.uk**

WIRED2FIRE - FACS HOUSE - 37/39 Holmesdale Road - Dorking - Surrey - RH5 4HS

MOUSE | **£75** from Currys www.snipca.com/53912

Cherry Xtrfy M64

Let it scroll

This lightweight wireless mouse is incredibly comfortable to use. It's designed for right-handed people, with long indentations on each side and a steep angle to the buttons that meant it fitted snugly in our palm.

Its design is simple and fairly conventional. We tested the black version though it's also available in white (from the link above) and blue (from Amazon: www.snipca.com/53960).

We're less keen on the location of the USB-C charging port. It's on the rear right-hand side, which can make the mouse tricky to use while the charging cable is plugged in. Thankfully, the included cable is light and 1.8m long, so it's unlikely to limit your movement. The battery should last around 75 hours between charges. We used it for four days and it never fell below 75 per cent of its full charge.

The Xtrfy M64 doesn't come with software. Instead you customise it using the slider and selector buttons under the mouse. We found the presets fine for our needs, with plenty of scope for adjusting sensitivity and accuracy. The mouse even has a built-in battery-level indicator, although to use it you have to press a combination of buttons and work out what the coloured lights mean. Software would've been more useful.

We were pleased with the M64's performance. The top and side buttons feel satisfying and responsive when pressed. The scroll wheel moves easily with just enough resistance, and is easy to click without inadvertently scrolling.

SPECIFICATIONS

26,000dpi sensor • 5-hour battery life • Wireless USB dongle supplied • 40x65x120mm (HxWxD) • 55g • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/53912

VERDICT A mouse that's comfortable to use with plenty of customisation options, but accompanying software would have been nice

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Logitech Lift Vertical Ergonomic Mouse £50 Even more comfortable to use and ideal if you suffer from RSI

PHONE CHARGER | **£18** from Amazon www.snipca.com/53913

Inui Ergonomic Wireless Charger Stand

Standing charge

While iPhone owners have plenty of wireless chargers to choose from, Android phone users have fewer options. This is partly because all Apple phones support MagSafe wireless charging – a technology that uses magnets to attach your device to a wireless charger. Android phones with wireless charging don't contain magnets, so they're not compatible with magnetic chargers.

Thankfully this charging stand from UK firm Inui is compatible with iPhones and Android devices from Google, Samsung and Motorola that support wireless charging.

To get around the lack of magnets in Android phones, the Inui Ergonomic Wireless Charger Stand's cradle has a lip on its bottom edge, which you simply rest your phone on. The cradle also rotates 90 degrees, so you can place your phone vertically or lay it almost flat while charging. It's perfect for your bedside if you use your phone to wake you up in the morning. Meanwhile the square base and weighty construction make the stand sturdy and difficult to knock over.

Sadly, its USB-C cable is only one metre long, which might not reach a wall socket. It doesn't come with a charging block either, so you'll need to buy an 18W adapter to get the fastest charging rates. At this speed, it charged our iPhone 13 Pro from empty in just two hours 16 minutes, which is an excellent result.

SPECIFICATIONS

Up to 18W fast charging • USB-C power in • 1m USB-C cable • Adjustable stand • 190x108x105mm (HxWxD) • 410g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/53913

VERDICT A sturdy wireless charger that's compatible with more smartphones than most

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Anker 313 Wireless Charger Stand £18 A similar device, though you can't adjust the angle of the cradle

SOUNDBAR | **£99** from Argos www.snipca.com/53955

Sony HT-SF150

Sounds affordable

Computer active RECOMMENDED ★★★★

To keep prices low TV manufacturers often compromise sound quality. You can counter this by adding a soundbar (as we explain on page 62). The Sony HT-SF150 offers significant improvements over sub-standard TV speakers for a very reasonable price.

> "An affordable TV soundbar that offers clarity and power"

Setting it up is simple as long as your TV has either an HDMI ARC port or a digital optical output. Both are common, but it's worth checking that your TV has one before you buy. If so, you can connect the soundbar using the included cables, plug it into a power socket and you're up and running. We used the HDMI ARC connection in our tests because it lets you adjust the sound bar's volume using your TV's remote control, which is more convenient than juggling two remotes.

Sound quality is very impressive for the price. We didn't encounter much tinniness or distortion in our tests, even at medium to high volumes. It can get surprisingly loud, too, with a power output of 120W, which is considerably higher than most budget soundbars.

Dialogue was impressively clear, with voices sounding natural and easy to understand. When listening to a podcast, we switched to Voice mode using the included remote. This really brought speech to the forefront, making it crisp and clear.

As well as Voice, the HT-SF150 offers Standard, Cinema, Music, Night and Auto Sound modes. Auto mode adjusts the soundbar depending on what you're watching or listening to, though we felt we achieved better results when choosing its settings manually.

A weak area for most soundbars is bass output. Although the HT-SF150 won't shake your walls, it produces decent bass tones considering it doesn't come with a separate woofer.

Sound-wise, our only criticism is that its output can get little muddy if there's a lot going on at the same time, such as voices, sound effects and a musical soundtrack, for example.

We also found the soundbar's LED lights confusing. These indicate various modes, volume and sound adjustments, and show when Bluetooth is connected or in pairing mode. This works fine as long as you understand what the various flashing lights mean, but we'd prefer a screen that tells you exactly what's going on.

SPECIFICATIONS

2.0 speaker channels • 1x HDMI ARC port • 1x USB port • 1x digital optical port • Bluetooth 4.2 • 64x88x900mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty

www.snipca.com/53955

VERDICT A soundbar that can bring superior sound to your TV if its built-in speakers are lacking

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Sony HT-S2000 £287 This Sony soundbar offers even better sound, but is more expensive

DO I REALLY NEED...

A router with a 10-mile range?

What is it?

Australian firm Morse Micro (www.morsemicro.com) has launched the HaLowLink 1, a router that can beam Wi-Fi up to 10 miles away. Despite this vast range, it costs just €98 (around £81 from www.snipca.com/53958).

What does it do?

It uses Wi-Fi HaLow (also known as IEEE 802.11ah) to transmit and receive Wi-Fi signals over great distances. The router also comes with regular 2.4GHz Wi-Fi 4 for normal use.

What's the catch?

It's slow, offering just 32Mbps at long range. In comparison, 2.4GHz Wi-Fi 4 can reach up to 300Mbps. What's more, it's licensed for use on the 900MHz band in the US, Canada and Australia, but is illegal in the UK. Certification for the rest of the world (using the 868MHz band) is in the works.

So can I do without it?

Yes, especially given its legal status. Once legal, it might help get Wi-Fi to remote areas, but most people will be better off using the mobile network.

NEXT ISSUE

On Sale Weds 26 Mar

Beelink S13 One of the cheapest mini PCs we've ever reviewed

Fiio JM21 Portable MP3 player for those with their own digital music collection

These and much more...

Subscribe to Computeractive at www.getcomputeractive.co.uk

Buy It

Find out which other products we liked. Buy our 2024 **Back Issue CD**: £19 from **www.snipca.com/53433**

Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

LAPTOP

Dell Inspiron 14 Plus
£799 from www.snipca.com/51831
Tested Issue 683

This laptop has the same processor (Intel Core Ultra 7 155H) as our previous favourite (Acer Swift Go 4), but manages to squeeze more speed out of it. It also comes with 16GB RAM, 512GB SSD and a 14in 2240x1400-pixel screen. Excellent value overall.

ALTERNATIVE Acer Swift Go 14 Still a fast and powerful laptop, with a great 14in screen. £699 from www.snipca.com/49733

DESKTOP PC

Palicomp AMD Cobra
£400 from www.snipca.com/43515
Tested Issue 643

This fast PC is a mouth-watering bargain, with 16GB of RAM, a 2TB SSD and a six-core processor – though it lacks USB-C ports and built-in Wi-Fi.

ALTERNATIVE Wired2Fire Ultima WS Home Office Workstation Blisteringly fast PC, powered by an overclocked eight-core processor and 1TB SSD. £656 from www.snipca.com/41500

APPLE iPAD

Apple iPad 10.9in
£329 from www.snipca.com/53977
Tested Issue 646

The price of the 10th-generation iPad, released in 2022, has fallen far enough that it's the best-value model. The link above takes you to Apple, but also check John Lewis where it's been as low as £309.

ALTERNATIVE iPad mini 7 The 2024 version of the mini improves the colour accuracy on the 8.3in screen and has a more powerful processor. £499 from www.snipca.com/52573

ANDROID TABLET

PRICE DROP

Honor MagicPad2
£450 from www.snipca.com/53150
Tested Issue 700

With a larger screen (12.3in) than the Galaxy Tab S9 (below) and a similar performance for less money, Honor's MagicPad2 is a superb new tablet. The OLED screen has a strikingly sharp resolution, and yet battery life is a mighty 18 hours.

ALTERNATIVE Samsung Galaxy Tab S9 Has a much brighter screen than its predecessor, making it ideal for watching TV. Also has a faster processor, speeding up tasks. £799 (128GB) from www.snipca.com/50039

APPLE iPHONE

Apple iPhone 16
£799 from www.snipca.com/53981
Tested Issue 695

This is the best new iPhone for years, boosted by a processor that's as fast as more expensive models. The screen is excellent, while the new Camera Control button gives lots of ways to take photos.

ALTERNATIVE iPhone 14 Now heavily discounted, this remains a speedy phone with great features and an impressive camera. £549 (128GB) from www.snipca.com/53982

ANDROID PHONE

Google Pixel 7a
£299 from www.snipca.com/53388
Tested Issue 660

A cheaper version of Google's flagship phone, this uses AI to add clarity to photos, and lasts an impressive 10 hours. Has a fast processor and 8GB RAM to supercharge performance.

ALTERNATIVE Nothing Phone 2a Don't be put off by the odd name. This has a distinctive design, superb camera and decent battery life. From a UK company too. £319 from www.snipca.com/49930

Mother's Day gifts from £20

FREE HOME MAGAZINE FOR YOU!
SPRING CLEAN & declutter
RUTH LANGSFORD AT 65
FERN BRITTON
HEALTHY WEEKNIGHT DINNERS
DATING IN YOUR 60s
TURN YOUR DREAMS INTO REALITY
FIND YOUR PERFECT PORTION SIZE

Show your love this Mother's Day

DISCOVER THE REST OF OUR RANGE

VISIT WWW.MAGAZINESDIRECT.COM/MDAY25

Offer closes 30th April 2025. Offer open to new subscribers only. After your trial issues, your subscription will continue at the price shown at the point of purchase. Offer is by Direct Debit.

SCAN ME

WALLPAPER IN BACKGROUND GRANDIFLORA ROSE, DESIGNER GUILD
PHOTOGRAPHS (BACKGROUND) POLLY WREFORD

Buy It

Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

MINI PC

Geekom A8
£899 from www.snipca.com/51157
Tested Issue 689

This tiny machine (37x112x112mm) doesn't have much room for ports, but makes up for it with a 2TB SSD, a fast processor and an SD card slot for adding storage. It comes with 32GB RAM, as does a slightly slower model that's typically around £170 cheaper and has only a 1TB SSD. Take your pick.

ALTERNATIVE GMKtec NucBox M7 Pro Has an older processor, but comes with plenty of ports and room to add a graphics card. £560 from www.snipca.com/52858

EBOOK READER

Amazon Kindle Paperwhite
£160 from www.snipca.com/52730
Tested Issue 698

The sixth version of the Paperwhite has a larger screen (7in), faster page turns and longer battery life (12 weeks – up from 10). Its glare-free finish means you can easily read it in bright sunlight, and its 300ppi resolution makes text a joy to read.

ALTERNATIVE Kobo Libra Kobo's first colour e-reader, with over 4,000 tones to make illustrations and photos leap out. £210 from www.snipca.com/50192

SECURITY SOFTWARE

Norton 360 Premium
£19.99 from www.snipca.com/33247
Tested Issue 629

Norton has always performed strongly in our antivirus tests, regularly making the top three. Owned by US firm NortonLifeLock, it's available at a discount on our Software Store. Use the link above for a 10-device, two-year licence. Other versions are available, including Norton 360 for Gamers.

ALTERNATIVE Bitdefender Total Security Another top performer that we're offering at a discount. £19.99 from www.snipca.com/41141

WEBCAM

Logitech C925e Business Webcam
£65 from www.snipca.com/50751
Tested Issue 608

Despite the name, this webcam is also great for home users. Its standout feature is automatically adjusting itself to keep your picture looking sharp. It offers a 78-degree field of view, which is fine for everyday video chats with one person in front of the camera.

ALTERNATIVE Creative Live Cam Sync 4K Affordable 4K webcam with high-quality video that can also capture voice from a distance. £38 from www.snipca.com/51577

PC MONITOR

Philips 27E1N1600AE
£180 from www.snipca.com/51687
Tested Issue 692

An affordable 27in monitor with a sharp resolution, impressive image quality and a sturdy build. It has an HDMI port, a USB-C port and two USB 3.0. The hefty base means you can raise and tilt the monitor easily using just one hand.

ALTERNATIVE Asus ROG Strix XG27ACS Another excellent 27in monitor with 1440p resolution and a fast refresh rate aimed at gamers. £229 from www.snipca.com/49898

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

Corsair MP600 Pro LPX 1TB
£79 from www.snipca.com/52658
Tested Issue 630

In our tests, this M.2 SSD hit speeds of 7,364MB/s and 6,870MB/s when reading and writing data – astonishingly fast scores. It's compatible with the new PCIe 4.0 standard, which is twice as fast as PCIe 3.0. The 1TB model costs £79; 2TB costs £136.

ALTERNATIVE Crucial MX500 500GB As fast as an SSD can get in the traditional 2.5in SATA format, this is a great-value upgrade. £50 from www.snipca.com/53808

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 4...
SwannBuddy4K video doorbells

Winner of a Recommended award in Issue 700 (page 28), the SwannBuddy4K video doorbell from Swann Security is a full-featured, easy-to-install wireless doorbell and chime unit that's now even smarter. It can operate completely wire-free with the rechargeable battery or connect to your existing doorbell wiring.

See every detail in crystal-clear 4K with head-to-toe view and a super-wide 165-degree viewing angle. The SwannShield AI Voice Assistant can talk with visitors for you in a natural, dynamic way to take the worry out of doorway security.

Its True Detect system senses heat and movement, and it sees in the dark up to 16ft with powerful infrared night vision. You can save clips locally and to the cloud. It's security you can trust.

To enter this competition, answer the question at www.snipca.com/53771 and submit your details by midnight Tuesday 25 March. Good luck!

You can buy the **SwannBuddy 4K** for £169.99 from www.snipca.com/53116. For information on more Swann products, including security cameras, visit https://uk.swann.com.

PRINTER

Epson EcoTank ET-2830

£250 from www.snipca.com/51715
Tested Issue 676

This has recently risen in price from £180, but it's still better value than the ET-1810 because it adds copying and scanning to its functions for £110 more. Print quality is great, especially for photos, which have crisp details, vivid colours and realistic skin tones.

ALTERNATIVE Epson EcoTank ET-1810
Not the fastest printer, but comes with enough ink for 4,500 mono and 7,500 colour pages. £140 from www.snipca.com/52191

SMART TV

PRICE DROP

Bush 43UT24SB

£189 from www.snipca.com/53637
Tested Issue 703

It's rare to find a 43in TV this cheap, especially with a superbly bright screen. Sound isn't bad either, and it offers most of the streaming services, including Freely. Its TiVo operating system is very easy to use.

ALTERNATIVE Samsung CU8000
More expensive, but has a 55in LED screen and sharp 4K resolution. Connectivity is good, with three HDMI and two USB ports. £419 from www.snipca.com/52110

ROUTER

PRICE DROP

Asus RT-AXE7800

£210 from www.snipca.com/52957
Tested Issue 665

This router has Wi-Fi 6E, so will be capable of the fastest possible speeds on the 6GHz network over the next few years. It has five Ethernet ports and also a USB 3.0 port to connect a hard drive or NAS drive.

ALTERNATIVE Synology WRX560
Our previous favourite remains an excellent choice, delivering speeds of up to 791.5Mbps. Add more units to set up mesh Wi-Fi. £176 from www.snipca.com/52051

Computer active

Computeractive 2024

Back Issue CD & USB Stick

Both the CD and Stick contain all 26 issues from 2024

ON SALE NOW!

Buy the CD from us at
www.snipca.com/53433

Buy the Stick from us at
www.snipca.com/53180

Workshops & Tips

14 pages of easy-to-follow workshops and expert tips

35 Master Google's Gemini AI chatbot
38 Easily edit CSV files
40 Readers' Tips
42 Browser Tips: Discover the best new features in Brave

PLUS
44 Phone & Tablet Tips
46 Make Windows Better
47 Make Office Better
48 In the Club: Create a Facebook Story

HOW TO...

Master Google's Gemini AI chatbot

by Nik Rawlinson

What you need: Web browser; Gemini app **Time required:** One hour

OpenAI's ChatGPT is the best-known AI chatbot, but it has plenty of impressive rivals. One is Google's Gemini, which you might have come across in a previous incarnation when it was known as Bard.

Both Gemini and ChatGPT use what's known as a large language model (LLM) to generate answers. An LLM is a huge pool of unstructured data, such as books, news stories, translations, film scripts and so on, which the AI uses to generate its written output. It can also use this data to answer questions, which is why you can ask an AI service just about anything and get a convincing answer.

Like ChatGPT, Gemini has free and paid-for versions. Many of its core capabilities are free, as we'll explain here. The paid-for edition, called Gemini Advanced, lets you use it in Google Drive. It also has 'Gems', which are small programs that perform specific tasks. You can add as many as you like to a premium account by clicking the diamond logo in the Gemini sidebar.

To use Gemini Advanced, you'll need to upgrade your Google Account to at least the £18.99-per-month AI Premium plan (www.snipca.com/53956). This also increases your Google storage to a massive 2TB and adds other features including Fitbit Premium (www.snipca.com/53957), and face-detection and 30 days of video history for Nest cameras.

At £18.99, Gemini Advanced isn't cheap, but you can try it free for one month. If you decide the extra features are worth it, you can subscribe without having to commit long term because AI Premium is only available on a monthly basis. You can cancel it at any time.

1 Log into Gemini with your Google account

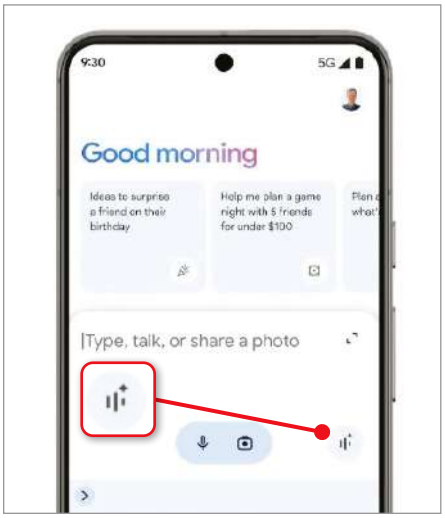
The simplest way to use Gemini is online at https://gemini.google.com. You'll need to log in using your Google account. Click the blue 'Chat with Gemini' button then type into the Ask Gemini box at the bottom.

Gemini remembers things you've discussed and uses that knowledge in future interactions. So, if you'd previously asked it "what can I do in Gloucester this weekend?", and then asked "will it rain?" (1 in our screenshot right), it should give you the coming weekend's weather for Gloucester 2 rather than the weather for your current location 3. It sometimes searches the web for answers but, unlike ChatGPT, doesn't show which sites.

Gemini remembers past questions, so it will know what locations you're talking about

You can also use Gemini on the Android (www.snipca.com/53943) or iOS (www.snipca.com/53944) app. This has the same Ask Gemini box you'll find on the website, and a microphone button for speaking your queries (this button also appears on the website, but we find it easier to speak into our phone than a computer).

To the right of the app's Ask Gemini box, there's a button that looks like three vertical lines and a star (see screenshot on the next page). Tap this and you can have a flowing spoken conversation


9:30
5G
Good morning
Ideas to surprise a friend on their birthday
Help me plan a game night with 5 friends for under $100
Type, talk, or share a photo

Tap this button in the Android or iOS app to start chatting with Gemini

How I use AI chatbots

I find AI a useful starting point for my research, but I don't often use any AI service as a reference source in its own right. Instead, I like to ask it a broad question so it can give me some pointers that I can then read up on in more depth myself. As such, AI is more of an inspiration for me than a core part of my workflow.

Nik Rawlinson

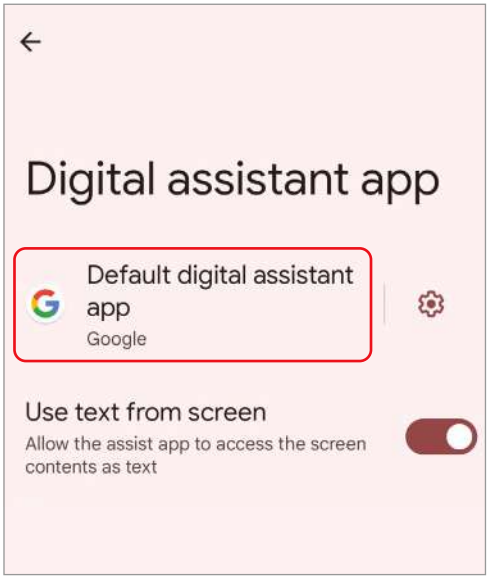
How do you use Google Gemini and other AI chatbots? Please let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

in the 'Live with Gemini' environment, in much the same way that you might type prompts. You won't see a written transcript of your chat, but the phrasing and voice are very convincing. To terminate a chat, tap the End button.

2 Control Gemini with your voice

Gemini is the default voice assistant on Google Pixel 9 phones and later, so owners of those won't need to download the Gemini app. If you have a Pixel 9 or later, you can access Gemini by saying "Hey Google". If you have a different Android device, you may still be able to switch the default voice assistant to Gemini. However, as Android phone manufacturers are free to alter the operating system, it may not work on every device.

Start by downloading the Gemini and Google apps for Android. The Gemini link is above, and you can download the Google app from www.snipca.com/53948. Now open Android's settings by swiping down from the top of the screen and clicking the cog at the bottom of the shortcuts. Tap 'Apps' followed by 'Default apps'. Check that under 'Digital digital assistant app' it says Google (see screenshot above). If not, tap 'Digital assistant app' followed by 'Default digital assistant app' at the top of the next screen and select Google on the screen that follows.


Digital assistant app
Default digital assistant app
Google
Use text from screen
Allow the assist app to access the screen contents as text

Check whether Google is set as your default digital assistant

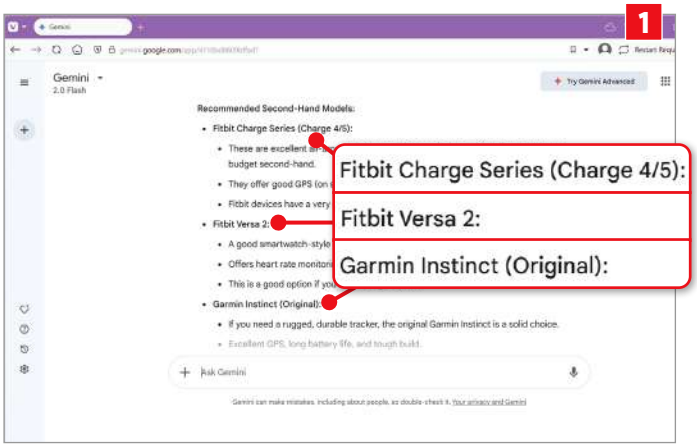
To access Gemini, say "Hey Google", or use whichever button combination you previously used to open Google Assistant.

3 Ask Gemini to recommend products

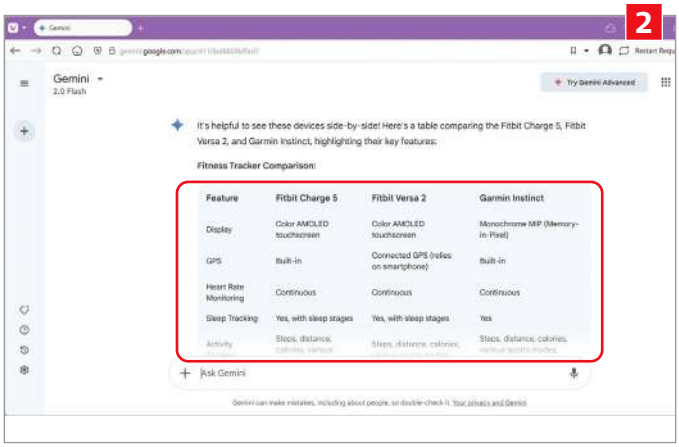
Let's say you want to buy a smartwatch to help you exercise more, and would like to know if you can buy a second-hand one. You can ask Gemini for help: "I want to spend less than £150 on a second-hand fitness tracker. Which models would you recommend?". You can see from screenshot 1 (below left) that Gemini came up with several options, with a few details about each of them.

Now that we have a starting point we can dig a bit deeper. We followed up with "Show me a table comparing Fitbit Charge 5, Versa 2 and Garmin Instinct".

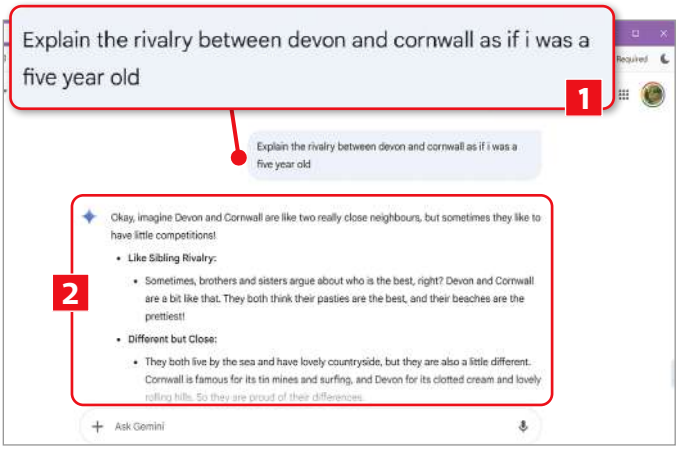
In a matter of seconds, Gemini presented us with a comprehensive table showing details of the products' screens, satnav capabilities, what types of activities they can track, their water resistance, battery life, and so on 2.



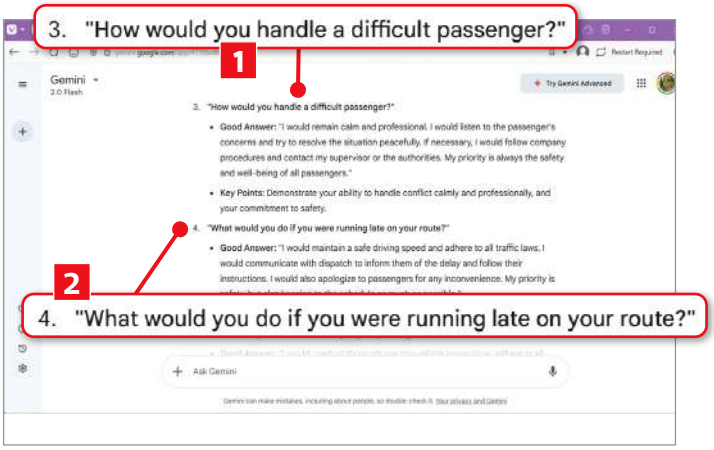
Gemini can recommend products that meet your requirements...



...and then organise them in a comparison table


Explain the rivalry between devon and cornwall as if i was a five year old
1
Explain the rivalry between devon and cornwall as if i was a five year old
Okay, imagine Devon and Cornwall are like two really close neighbours, but sometimes they like to have little competitions!
Like Sibling Rivalry:
Sometimes, brothers and sisters argue about who is the best, right? Devon and Cornwall are a bit like that. They both think their pasties are the best, and their beaches are the prettiest!
Different but Close:
They both live by the sea and have lovely countryside, but they are also a little different. Cornwall is famous for its tin mines and surfing, and Devon for its clotted cream and lovely
2
Ask Gemini

Gemini can help explain complicated issues, though it remains neutral on the Devon–Cornwall battle over scones


3. "How would you handle a difficult passenger?"
1
Gemini
Good Answer: "I would remain calm and professional. I would listen to the passenger's concerns and try to resolve the situation peacefully. If necessary, I would follow company procedures and contact my supervisor or the authorities. My priority is always the safety and well-being of all passengers."
Key Points: Demonstrate your ability to handle conflict calmly and professionally, and your commitment to safety.
"What would you do if you were running late on your route?"
Good Answer: "I would maintain a safe driving speed and adhere to all traffic laws. I would communicate with dispatch to inform them of the delay and follow their instructions. I would also apologize to passengers for any inconvenience. My priority is
2
4. "What would you do if you were running late on your route?"
Ask Gemini

Gemini can help you prepare for an interview by suggesting answers to relevant questions

Now we have a quick and easy way to compare the three products directly. If you need to share this information with someone else, scroll down to the bottom of the table where you'll find an 'Export to Sheets' link. This converts it to a spreadsheet and saves it in your Google Drive account.

4 Ask Gemini to explain subjects

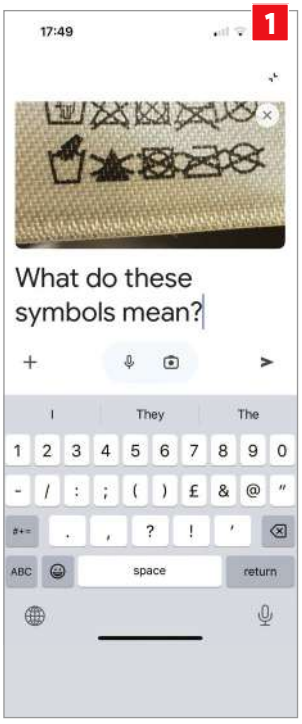
Gemini can help you understand complex issues. We've found that asking it to answer "as if I was a five year old" is a good way to get a friendly result. For example, when we asked it to "explain the rivalry between Devon and Cornwall as if I was a five year old" (1 in screenshot above), it based its answer on sibling rivalry, similarities, friendly competition and pasties 2. However, there was no mention of scones or whether you should put the jam or the cream on first.

This is where an AI's ability to understand context comes in. Rather than having to reword our original prompt, we followed up with "isn't there something to do with scones?" and Gemini came straight back with "You're absolutely right!", before explaining the preferences for each county. When we asked who was right, it refused to come down on either side.

5 Use Gemini to prepare for job interviews

Gemini can ask questions as well as answer them. This is useful when preparing for a meeting or exam. We prompted it "Can you give me some practice for a job interview? I am applying to be a bus driver", and it pulled up not only a series of questions we'd be likely to encounter, but also some suggested answers – and the reasons why those answers might put us in a good position. They were very specific, too, dealing with situations such as "how would you handle a difficult passenger?" (1 in our screenshot above right), and "what would you do if you were running late on your route?" 2.

You can also ask Gemini to write your covering letter. It helps if you include as much detail as you can in your prompt, such as how long you've been driving a bus, whether you have a clean licence and any achievements. But even where there are gaps in its knowledge it can work around them by writing suggestions in square brackets for you to fill in.

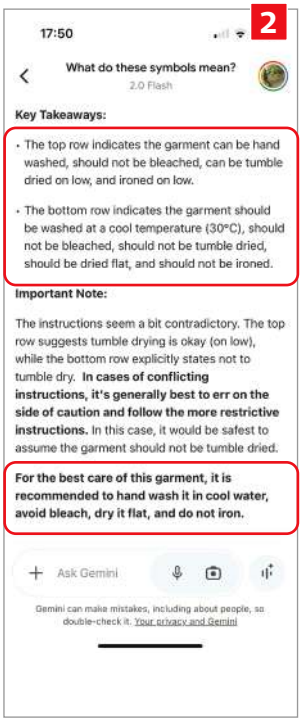


We asked Gemini to explain what these washing symbols mean...

6 Work out what's in a photo

Gemini can interpret pictures as well as text. We took a photo of the washing instructions on an item of clothing (see screenshot 1 below left). As well as explaining what each symbol on the label means 2, it gave its own opinion of how we should best handle the item in question.

As you can see from the screenshots below, we took this picture using the Gemini app on an iPhone. However, you can also attach files when working in your browser by clicking the '+' on the far left of the Ask Gemini box and selecting Image, Files or Drive. The Drive option lets you direct Gemini to a file saved in your Google Drive online storage.


17:50
2
What do these symbols mean?
2.0 Flash
Key Takeaways:
The top row indicates the garment can be hand washed, should not be bleached, can be tumble dried on low, and ironed on low.
The bottom row indicates the garment should be washed at a cool temperature (30°C), should not be bleached, should not be tumble dried, should be dried flat, and should not be ironed.
Important Note:
The instructions seem a bit contradictory. The top row suggests tumble drying is okay (on low), while the bottom row explicitly states not to tumble dry. In cases of conflicting instructions, it's generally best to err on the side of caution and follow the more restrictive instructions. In this case, it would be safest to assume the garment should not be tumble dried.
For the best care of this garment, it is recommended to hand wash it in cool water, avoid bleach, dry it flat, and do not iron.
Ask Gemini
Gemini can make mistakes, including about people, so double-check it. Your privacy and Gemini

...and it gave us a full analysis of both rows

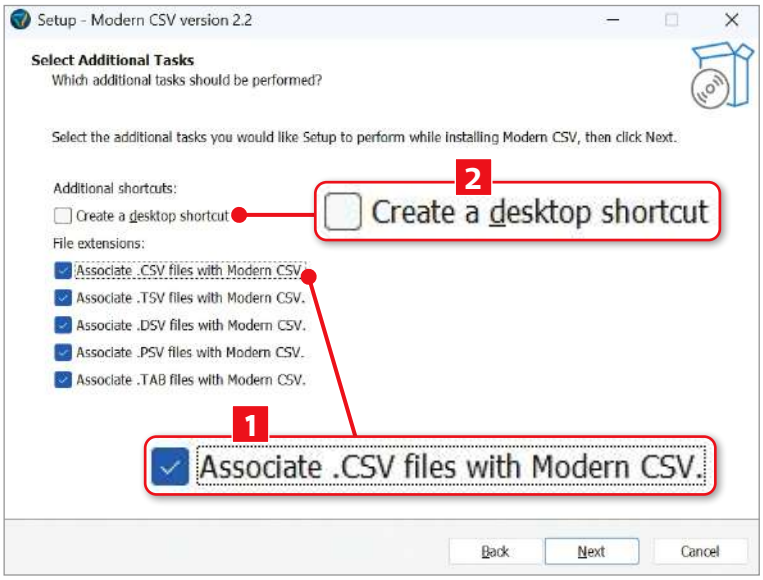
Easily edit CSV files

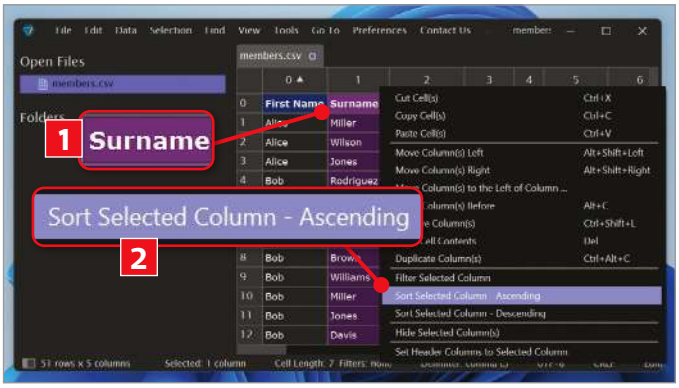
What you need: Modern CSV
Time required: 30 minutes

A simple but effective way to organise data is to use a CSV, or comma-separated values, file. Each line in a CSV file contains a set number of items with commas between them. This makes it easy to turn the data into a table, which you can then browse or edit. A spreadsheet such as Microsoft Excel can turn a CSV file into a table automatically, but if you don't need to do any calculations or work with formulas, a simper option is to use the program Modern CSV. Once you've opened your CSV file, you can sort the data, search within it and make changes without having to navigate long lists of values in a plain text file.

STEP 1

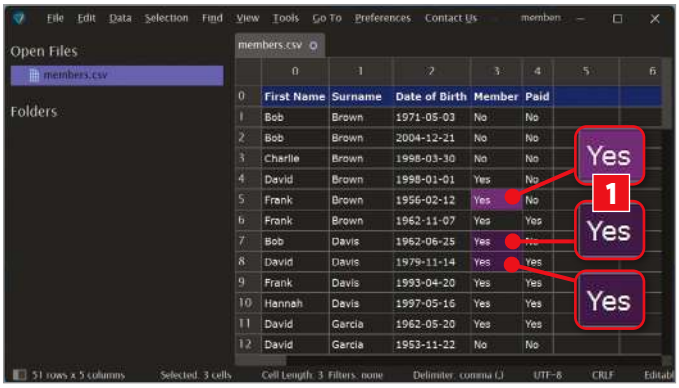
Download Modern CSV by clicking the blue 'Download for Windows' button at www.moderncsv.com. Launch the downloaded file to start the installer and, when you reach the Select Additional Tasks screen, untick any file types you don't want to open automatically in Modern CSV. If you're not sure what any of them are, it's safe to leave them selected. We've chosen to keep the option 'Associate .CSV files with Modern CSV' 1 selected, but if you sometimes edit CSV files in a spreadsheet, you might want to untick this. We also unticked the option to 'Create a desktop shortcut' 2 because we prefer to launch it from the Windows menu.


Setup - Modern CSV version 2.2
Select Additional Tasks
Which additional tasks should be performed?
Select the additional tasks you would like Setup to perform while installing Modern CSV, then click Next.
Additional shortcuts:
Create a desktop shortcut
2
Create a desktop shortcut
File extensions:
Associate .CSV files with Modern CSV.
Associate .TSV files with Modern CSV.
Associate .DSV files with Modern CSV.
Associate .PSV files with Modern CSV.
Associate .TAB files with Modern CSV.
1
Associate .CSV files with Modern CSV.
Back
Next
Cancel



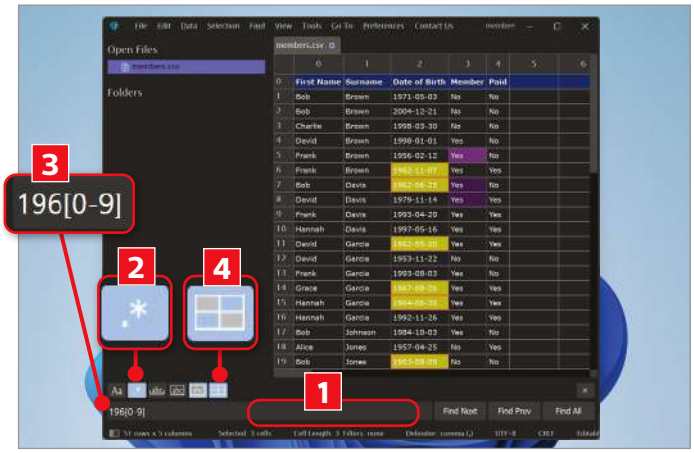
STEP 2

Press Ctrl+O and navigate to the file you want to open. A common task you'll probably want to perform is to sort your data. Our table is in alphabetical order by first names, which appear in the first column. To sort the data using a different column, right-click its numbered header as we have with the Surname column 1, then choose 'Sort Selected Column – Ascending' 2. This puts it in alphabetical order from A at the top to Z at the bottom. Choosing 'Sort Selecting Column – Descending' would put the entries in reverse alphabetical order.

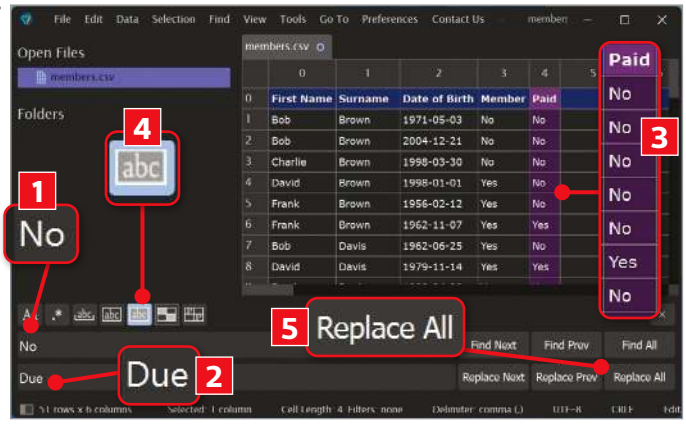


STEP 3

To edit a cell's contents, double-click it and either amend or delete the text inside. You can save time by editing several cells simultaneously. Click each one while holding the Ctrl key or, if they're consecutive, click the first cell, then hold Shift and click the last. Now type the new text, and it will replace the contents of each selected cell. In the screenshot, we've selected three non-consecutive cells by clicking them while holding Ctrl 1, and changed their contents from No to Yes.

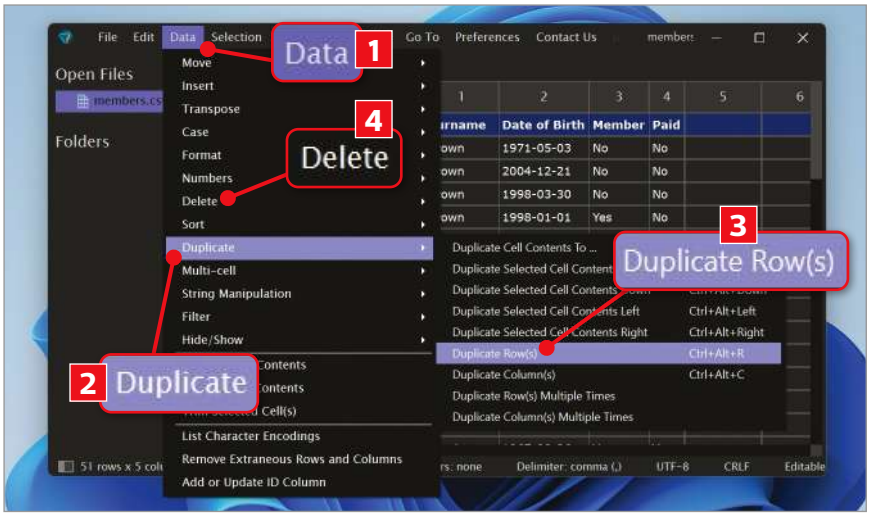


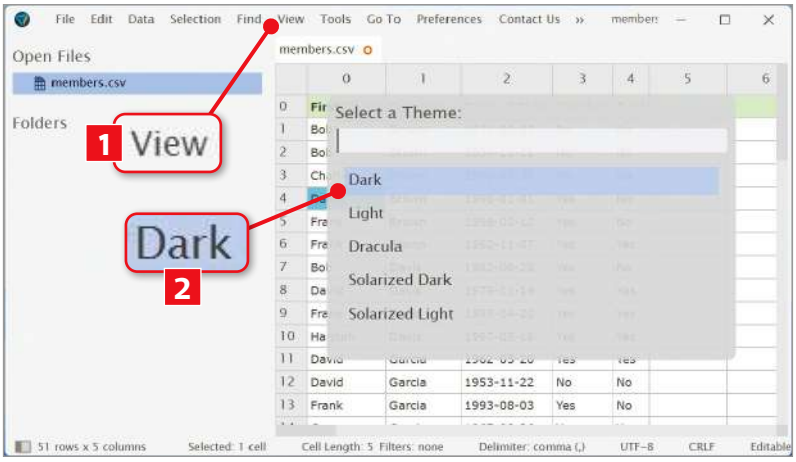
STEP 4 Placing data in a table makes it easy to search. Press Ctrl+F to open the search box 1. Now type whatever you're looking for. We want to find everyone born in the 1960s, but rather than search for 1960, then 1961, and so on, we've clicked the regular expressions button 2 and entered 196[0-9] 3. This will look for entries that start with 196 followed by any digit between 0 and 9. We clicked the Highlight Matches 4 button to highlight the results in the table. If we wanted to search for everyone born in the 20th century we'd instead search for 19[0-9][0-9].



STEP 5 Our search only looked for matches in the 'Date of Birth' column because that's the only one that contains strings of numbers. But what if the same data appears in two columns? Here, we've searched for the term No 1, which we want to replace with Due 2. However, we only want to swap the results in the Paid column. So, we've selected all the cells in Paid 3, which are now highlighted in purple, and clicked the 'Match Only in Selected Cells' button 4. We can now click Replace All 5 to swap No for Due without affecting the contents of the Member column.

STEP 6 If you need to make extensive edits to a particular record, having the original for reference can be a big help. So, click Data 1, hover over Duplicate 2 and click Duplicate Row(s) 3 to create a copy of the currently selected row. You can then apply any changes you need to the new copy, safe in the knowledge that you can revert to the old one if you make a mistake. When you've finished, delete the old row by hovering over Delete 4 and clicking Remove Row(s).





STEP 7 If you use Modern CSV a lot, you'll probably want to customise it so it's easier to use. Click View 1 and you'll find options to Set Font, Set Text Size and Set Theme. You have a choice of five themes. Dark 2 is the default, but we've switched to Light here because we find it easier on the eye. You can also access the tools you use most often without going through the menus. Press Ctrl+L and type the name of the command you want to use. You don't need to know exactly what it's called as long as you include a word or so from its name. Modern CSV will filter the list of options to match.

Readers' Tips

TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

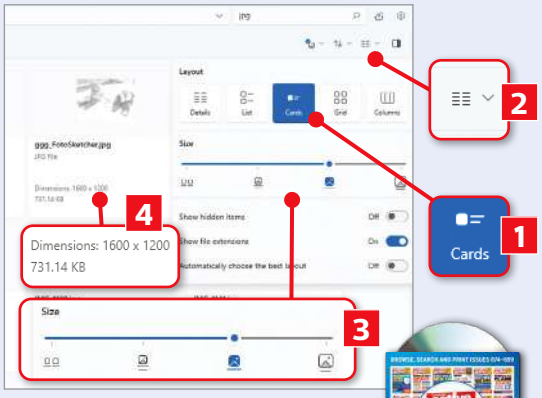
Use the new 'Card view' in Files

I've not read in *Computeractive* that there's a new version (3.9) of Files, even though I've been using it for over a year now. Allow me then to point out the new 'Cards' layout in version 3.9, which includes metadata like name, file type and size. It shows the information you need at a glance, and is another reason why it's better than relying on the basic File Explorer in Windows.

Open a folder in Files then click the Layout icon (1 in our screenshot) followed by Cards 2. Now move the slider 3 to decide how big you want the cards to appear. Images show the dimension 4, while videos show the length.

I was already using Files, so I only needed to click the top-right arrow button to update it to 3.9. If you've not already installed it, visit www.snipca.com/53748 and click the 'classic installer' link at the bottom.

George Harris



George wins a copy of our 2024 Back Issue CD

Buy it from us at www.snipca.com/53433

CABLES

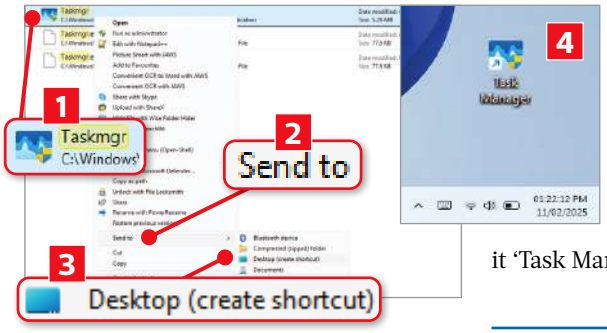
Check your phone's USB socket is working

In Issue 701 (page 68) Chris Witts asked why his USB cables failed at the same time.

I recently experienced the same issue with my Samsung A71 phone, when it suddenly wouldn't let me transfer files to my PC. I tried a number of cables without success. It then became apparent that the USB socket in the phone had worn out to the point where the socket contacts were failing. I missed the early warning sign that the phone was not charging at the usual fast rate.

So, bear in mind that the fault might lie within the phone, not with the cables you're attaching to it.

Tim Baker



WINDOWS

Create a one-click shortcut for Task Manager

Task Manager can solve many problems, but it can be fiddly to access. The solution is to create a one-click shortcut on your desktop. Open File Explorer and navigate to the **C:\Windows\System32** folder. Now scroll down to the 'Taskmgr' file (1 in our screenshot left), or search for it at the top right, then right-click it and select 'Send to' 2, followed by 'Desktop (create shortcut)' 3. You'll now have a shortcut on your desktop and can rename it 'Task Manager' 4 if you want.

Carl Hughes

GENEALOGY

Research miners in Cleveland ironstone mines

I read your article on searching records of mining accidents with great interest (Issue 703, page 16), but you appear to have overlooked ironstone mines. There were over 80 in the Cleveland district of North Yorkshire

Why I stopped using...

Windows clipboard

As secretary of a local church group, I need fast copy-and-paste access to lots of information. I was constantly being thwarted by the 25-item limit in Windows, so wanted something more versatile.

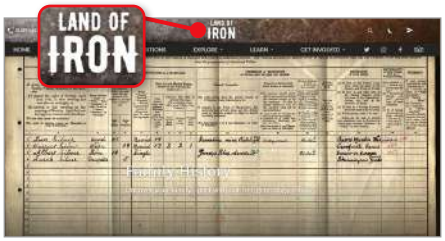
And what I use instead...

I now use **Ditto** (www.snipca.com/53796), which as far as I can tell doesn't have a limit. I can now copy anything I think will be useful, covering members' contact details, meeting notes, legal documents, email newsletters and so on.

When I know I'm going to be using it a lot I press the Ctrl+Spacebar shortcut to keep it on top of everything else on screen. I also set shortcuts for each of the 10 most recent items that Ditto has saved. To set these up, open Ditto, click the three horizontal dots at the bottom right then Options. Now click the Keyboard Shortcuts tab (1 in our screenshot) and press the shortcuts you want in the 'Position' boxes 2 – for example, Ctrl+Shift+1, Ctrl+Shift+2. Note that it won't let you choose 0 (zero).

Linda Kendall

Tell us why you stopped using a website, app or program: letters@computeractive.co.uk



alone. The last mine closed in 1964.

Sadly, over a thousand miners lost their lives in accidents in these mines, including many boys. We have information on these at the Land of Iron museum in Skinningrove Valley, Cleveland. It also has payslips, union cards and other records. Anyone interested should visit www.snipca.com/53792 (pictured above).

Ian Wilson

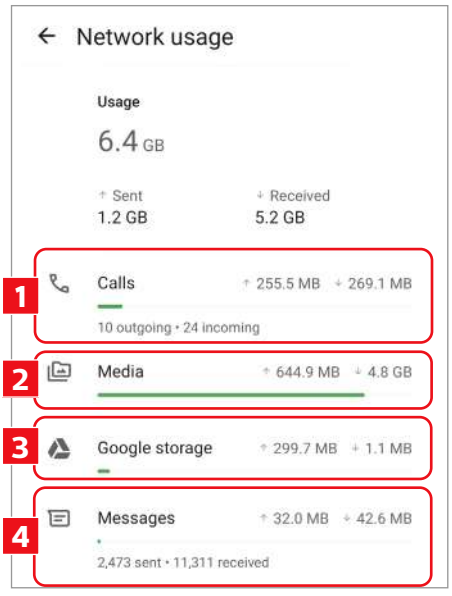
PHONES

See how many WhatsApp messages you've sent

I've just learned that WhatsApp shows you how many messages you've sent in total. I'm not sure how useful that is, but it's interesting all the same. Open WhatsApp, then tap the three vertical dots top right, followed by Settings. Now tap 'Storage and data', then 'Network usage'.

Going down from the top you'll see the number of calls you've made (1 in our screenshot below), how much media (photos and videos) is eating into your storage 2, how much you've backed up to Google Drive 3 and finally how many messages you've sent and received 4. I only started using WhatsApp three years ago and I've already sent over 2,400!

Christopher Roth



Reader recommends...

Kindle Paperwhite

£160 from www.snipca.com/52730

In your review of the Kindle Paperwhite ebook reader (Issue 698, page 26) you said it was a big improvement on the 2021 edition. That caught my eye because I was still using the 2018 model, and so assumed the jump in quality would be even greater.

For starters, the 7in screen of the new model is one inch larger than my old version. This struck me as soon as I started reading. I also noticed much faster page turns. My 2018 model started off fast, but became sluggish over time. I can't recall what I paid back in 2018, but it was around £120 for 8GB. The new Paperwhite gives you 16GB for £160.

One of the biggest claims you made in your review was that the battery went from 50 to 42 per cent in a week's intensive use. I used it recently every night for a week and the battery fell from 75 to 69 per cent, which is pretty good. It's now my main e-reader, but I don't want to chuck out my old one. Can anyone suggest a new use for it?

Duncan Smith

Want to recommend hardware or software to fellow readers?
Email letters@computeractive.co.uk

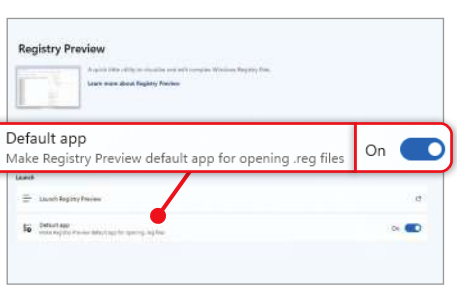
SOFTWARE

Create emergency USB backup stick with Hasleo

As a follow-up to your tip on using Hasleo Backup Suite (www.snipca.com/53669) to back up a hard drive (Issue 704, page 20), I'd recommend also creating an emergency backup USB stick during the process.

To do this, just click the Home tab, then select Tools (1 in our screenshot above), followed by Emergency Disk 2. I did this several years ago and it's rescued me a couple of times when Windows has failed to boot.

Mike Joseph



WINDOWS

Make Registry Preview default for registry files

I agree with your view that the Registry Preview in PowerToys gives you a simpler way of navigating the registry than Registry Editor (Issue 704, page 46). It's why I've set it as my default tool when opening registry files (.reg). You'll find this option below 'Launch Registry Preview' – click the slider so it turns blue (see screenshot above).

Doug Withers

WINDOWS

Share photos taken in the Camera app

I often use the 'Photo burst' tool in the Windows camera app (Issue 704, page 46) when chatting with my children in Australia. It's easy to share these photos after you've taken them.

After clicking the small photo at the bottom right, instead of clicking the three-dot menu you should click the Share icon (1 in our screenshot left). You can then share the photo with any contact you've saved 2, or scroll down and click an email app and send it that way 3.

Wayne Burrows

Browser Tips

BRAVE

Discover the best new features in Brave

It's been a while since Brave had a significant update, but version 175.178 – released mid-February – brings a host of welcome changes to the privacy-focused browser.

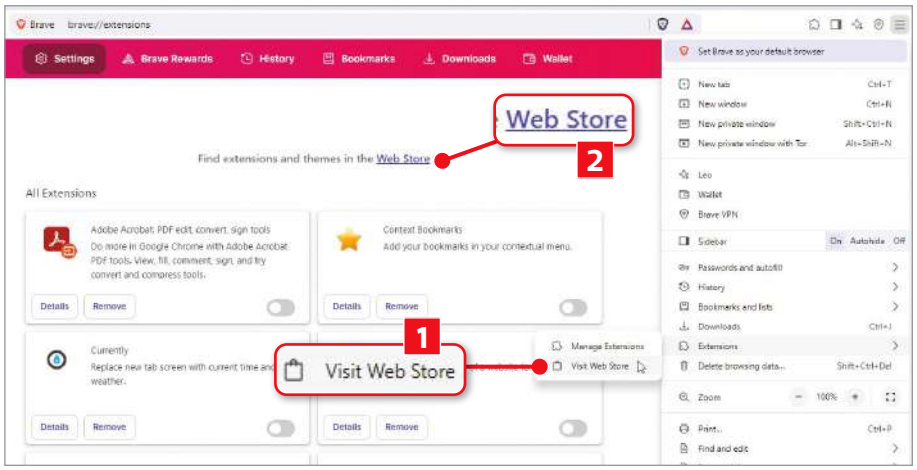
It's now easier to access the Chrome Web Store so you can install Chromium extensions in Brave – which some users don't realise is possible. A 'Visit Web Store' option has been added to the Extensions section of the main menu (1 in our screenshot below), and the Extensions page (brave://extensions) now has a direct link to the Chrome Web Store 2.

Brave has also introduced a quicker way to take screenshots of web pages. Previously, you needed to click the Share button in the address bar and choose Screenshot. You can now simply press Ctrl+Shift+S and then select the area you want to capture.

The vertical-tabs feature (which you activate by going to Settings, Appearance, then Tabs and switching on 'Use vertical tabs') has a new right-click menu. This lets you right-click an empty area of the vertical-tabs bar to access options including 'New tab', 'Reopen closed tabs' and 'Bookmark all tabs'.

Interestingly, Brave has removed one of its most noteworthy features – the ability to block all cookies on all websites. This was apparently 'breaking the web' for some users, so you're now limited to blocking third-party cookies by default.

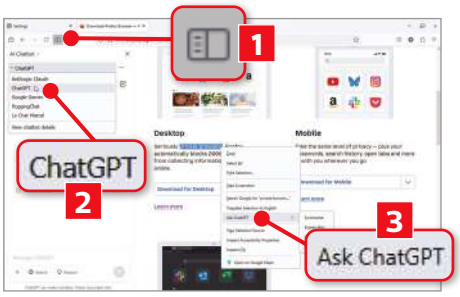
See our Workshop below to learn how to either restore the option or block all cookies for specific sites instead.



FIREFOX

Talk to ChatGPT while you browse the web

In our 'Why you must use ChatGPT' feature in Issue 702 (buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/53838), we mentioned that Firefox lets you access



ChatGPT through its experimental 'AI chatbot' feature. As of Firefox 136 (released 4 March), the feature is officially integrated with the browser, so you no longer need to enable it in Firefox Labs.

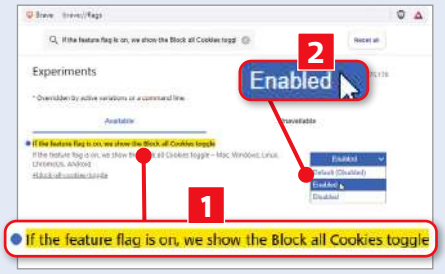
Just click the 'Show sidebars' button on the toolbar (to the right of the Reload button – 1 in our screenshot above) to open a sidebar on the left-hand side of the browser. Click the dropdown menu at the top and choose AI Chatbot – or press the keyboard shortcut Ctrl+Alt+X.

ChatGPT should now load in the sidebar, though you may get another supported AI assistant such as Google Gemini or Anthropic Claude. If so, click the list of chatbots and select ChatGPT 2.

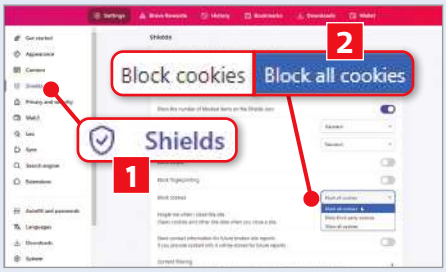
You can now talk to ChatGPT as you browse the web and ask it questions about the content you're viewing. As we explained in Issue 704 (page 9), you no longer need to sign into an OpenAI account to use ChatGPT's web-search option, but doing so unlocks more responses and features such as file uploads, chat history and voice mode.

If you'd prefer the ChatGPT sidebar to be on the right-hand side of the browser, click the dropdown menu at the top and choose 'Move Sidebar to Right'. You can

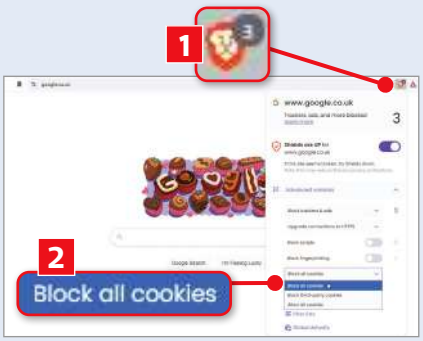
WORKSHOP Block all cookies on all websites in Brave



1 To restore Brave's 'Block all cookies' option, type brave://flags in the address bar and press Enter to load the Experiments page. Find the entry If the feature flag is on, we show the Block all Cookies toggle 1 and select Enabled in its dropdown menu 2.



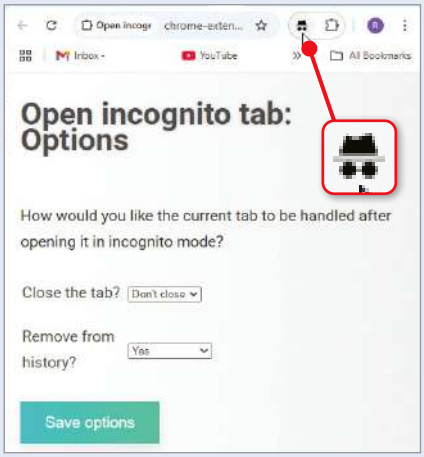
2 Click 'Relaunch' to restart the browser. When Brave reopens, click the three-line menu button and choose Settings. Select 'Shields' 1 and click the dropdown menu next to 'Block cookies'. The 'Block all cookies' option 2 will now have been restored.



3 Because blocking all cookies stops some sites working, it's wiser to block them on specific sites instead. Click the Shields (lion) button on the toolbar 1 and open 'Advanced controls'. Select 'Block all cookies' 2 to do so only on the current site.

BEST EXTENSION FOR... Switching to incognito mode

Open incognito tab
Chromium
www.snipca.com/53844
To view a web page in incognito mode in Chrome and other Chromium browsers, you can right-click a link to it and choose 'Open link in incognito window'. But your browser doesn't offer a quick way to switch the page you're currently viewing to private-browsing mode – instead you need to open an incognito window and type or paste the page's URL. 'Open incognito tab' makes it much easier to open the current page in incognito mode. You can either click its toolbar button (see screenshot); right-click the page and choose 'Open this tab in incognito'; or use the keyboard shortcut Alt+I. Go into the extension's Options to specify whether to close the current tab after it's been transferred to private mode, and to remove it from your browsing history.


Open incognito tab: Options
How would you like the current tab to be handled after opening it in incognito mode?
Close the tab?
Don't close
Remove from history?
Yes
Save options

If you don't like that, try...
Open in Private Mode
Firefox
www.snipca.com/53846
This extension brings the same functionality to Firefox, provided you grant it permission to run in the browser's private mode.

also interact with the chatbot by right-clicking text content on a web page and choosing Ask ChatGPT 3. Options include Summarise, 'Explain this' and 'Quiz me'.

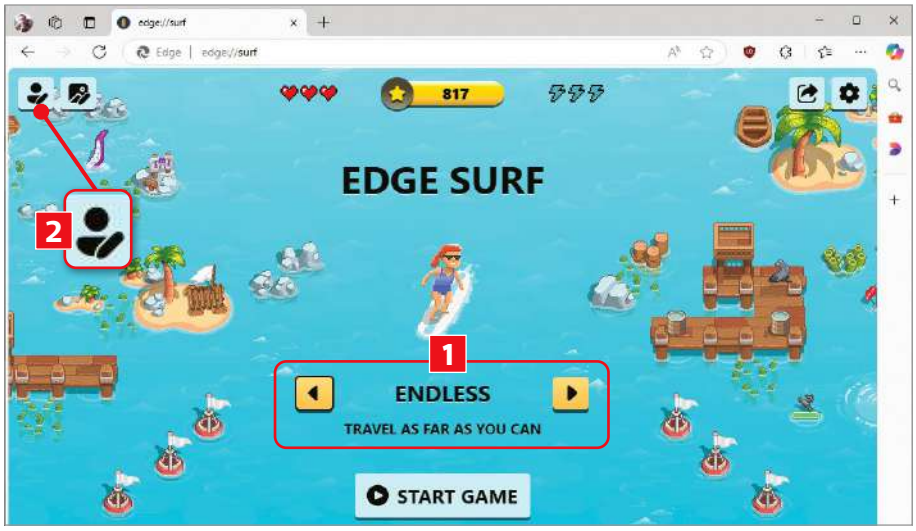
EDGE
Play the enhanced version of the Surf game

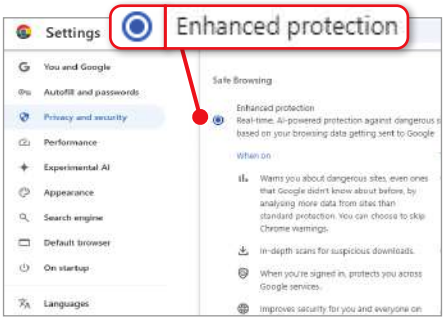
While Chrome has its built-in Dinosaur Game (also known as Chrome Dino, www.snipca.com/53840), Edge has its own timewaster called Surf (www.snipca.com/53841). This game loads when you go offline and when you type edge//surf in the browser's address bar, and involves guiding a surfer across a body of water, avoiding obstacles and collecting power-ups.

Microsoft has now revamped the Surf game, with higher-quality graphics that "retain the spirit of the original theme while levelling things up significantly". In addition to the three existing game modes – Endless, Time Trial and Zigzag – there's a new Collector mode, which challenges you to collect as many coins as you can while you surf.

Switch between these modes by clicking the left and right arrows on the Surf home screen (1 in our screenshot). To revert to the old Surf game, click the 'Edit theme' button in the top-left corner and select Surf Classic.

A new High Score bar measures your current progress against your previous best, and you can now customise the appearance of your surfer character. Click the 'Edit player' button top left 2 and choose your preferred outfit, hairstyle, skin tone and accessories. As before, you can control your surfer using your mouse or the cursor keys on your keyboard. Watch out for the deadly kraken!





CHROME
Get AI-powered protection against risky sites

Google has bolstered Chrome's 'Enhanced protection' security feature with new AI capabilities. It claims the option now provides "real-time, AI-powered protection against dangerous sites, downloads and extensions".

This means 'Enhanced protection' will be better able to detect and block new threats as you browse the web, in addition to those previously identified by Google. Chrome will also now perform deeper scans of files before you download them, and offer stronger protection across all the Google services you're signed into with your account.

To activate 'Enhanced protection', click Chrome's three-dot menu button then choose Settings followed by 'Privacy and security'. Click 'Security' and select 'Enhanced protection' in the Safe Browsing section (see screenshot above).

Note that the feature sends the URLs of sites you visit and a small sample of page content, downloads, extension activity and system information to Google to check if they're harmful.

Phone and Tablet Tips

ANDROID & iOS

Use images and audio in ChatGPT WhatsApp chats

In our 'Why you must use ChatGPT' feature in Issue 702 (buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/53838), we explained how to add the AI assistant as a WhatsApp contact so you can chat like you're messaging a friend. OpenAI has now expanded the feature to let you include images and voice notes in your WhatsApp conversations with the chatbot.

This means you can ask ChatGPT to analyse photos you upload or capture with your phone's camera, and tell you more information about their subjects. Just tap the paperclip or camera icon to add an image to your text query (1 in our screenshot right).

To interact with ChatGPT in WhatsApp using your voice, press the microphone button to record and share a voice message 2. The chatbot will detect what you're saying and respond accordingly in text form. You can then either submit another voice note, or continue the conversation by typing.

To add ChatGPT as a WhatsApp contact, tap the green plus-sign button and choose 'New contact'. Set 'ChatGPT' as the first name, then tap the dropdown menu under Country and select United States. Enter the number 1-800-242-8478 and press Save.

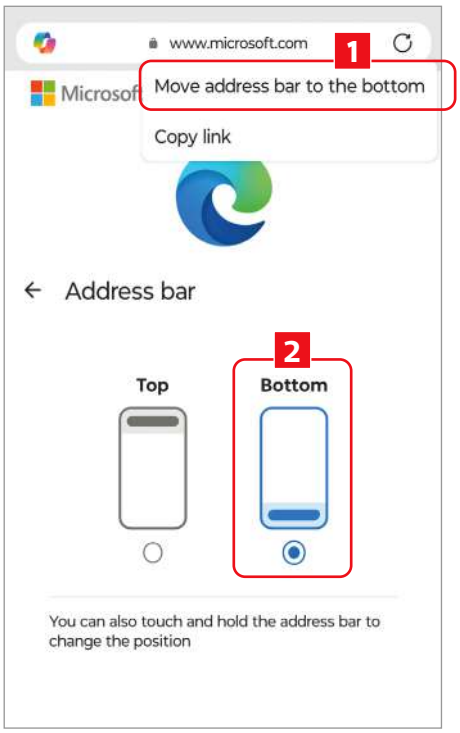
ANDROID & iOS

Move Edge's address bar to the bottom

Like their desktop counterparts, many mobile web browsers have their address bars at the top of the screen. But when you're browsing one-handed on your phone or tablet, it's actually more convenient to have the address bar at the bottom, where it's easier to reach without stretching your fingers.

The Firefox app has its address bar at the bottom, as does Safari on iPhones (though not iPads), while Samsung's Internet browser lets you choose between top and bottom. They're now joined by Edge, which has added the option to move the address bar to its app for Android (www.snipca.com/53849) and iOS (www.snipca.com/53850).

To relocate Edge's address bar, simply long-press it and select 'Move address bar to the bottom' (1 in our screenshot above right). If you don't see that option, tap the three-line menu button in the bottom-right corner of the browser and choose Settings, then Appearance. Tap 'Address bar' and select Bottom 2. You can move it back to the top in the same way.



ANDROID

Send yourself RCS messages in Google Messages

Google has updated its Messages app (www.snipca.com/53864) with the

BEST NEW APPS — What you should install this fortnight

Apple TV

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/53853
iOS www.snipca.com/53854

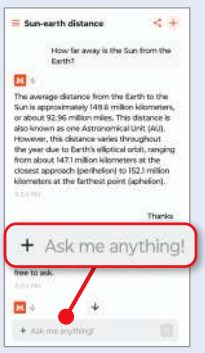
Apple has finally made its TV app available for Android devices, seven years after it was released for iOS. This means you can now watch its Apple TV+ streaming service on your phone or tablet, as well as on your TV – and download popular shows such as *Severance (pictured)*, *Slow Horses* and *Ted Lasso* to watch offline.

Le Chat by Mistral AI

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/53857
iOS www.snipca.com/53858

As you can guess from its name, this new chatbot is from a French company but speaks perfectly good English. Le Chat provides impressively speedy and informative answers to your queries and can identify the subjects of images you upload. For unlimited responses and web searches, you'll need a £12 montly subscription.



Apple Invites

Free*

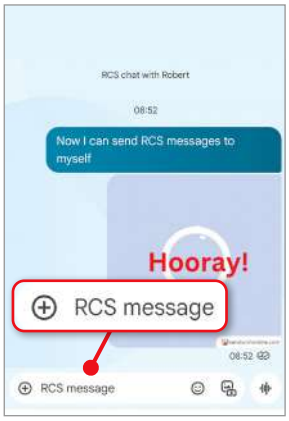
iOS www.snipca.com/53865

Apple's other new app this fortnight lets you create and share custom invitations for events. You can use your own photos, choose from a gallery of backgrounds to the venue, and add directions. You can even include the weather forecast for the day if it's outside. To create events, you need an iCloud+ subscription, but anyone can reply to your invites without one.

*Contains in-app purchases

option to send yourself messages using the RCS (Rich Communication Services) protocol. Previously, you could only message yourself via SMS, which meant you could be charged by your mobile network for attaching photos and videos not covered by your monthly data allowance.

RCS lets you send images and other files for free, provided the recipient is also using RCS, which obviously will be the case when you message yourself. It means you can write yourself notes and reminders, containing high-quality photos, videos and audio files, without being charged by your network. It also lets you check that content displays correctly before sending a message to someone else. WhatsApp introduced a similar 'message yourself' option in 2022 (see Issue 646, page 45).



To confirm the Messages app (which comes installed on all Android phones) is set to use RCS, look for 'RCS message' in the message box (see screenshot above) when you start a conversation with yourself. If it says 'Text message' instead, tap your profile picture in the top-right corner of the app and tap 'Messages settings'. Select 'RCS chats' and switch on the option 'Turn on RCS chats'.

iOS

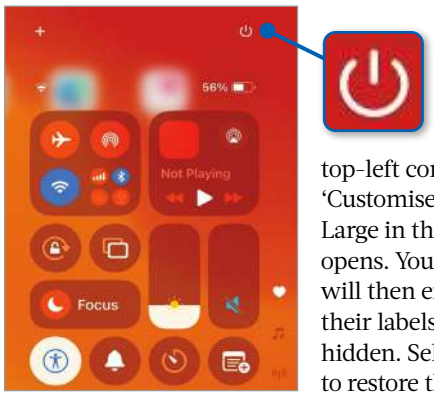
Turn off your iPhone or iPad more easily

Many of the changes implemented by Apple's last few iOS updates have related to its Apple Intelligence AI feature, which is only available on newer iPhones and iPads. One useful new option you can use on any device running iOS 18 lets you power off without pressing any physical buttons.

Instead, swipe down from the top-right corner of your screen to open the Control Centre and press the new power button that appears in the very top right (see screenshot above right). Drag the on-screen slider to the right to turn off your iPhone or iPad instantly. You'll need to use the physical power button (on the side or top, depending on your device) to turn it back on.

Another handy addition in iOS 18 lets you enlarge the app icons on your home screen and remove the labels below them. This makes your screen look less cluttered and individual apps easier to open – especially on an iPhone.

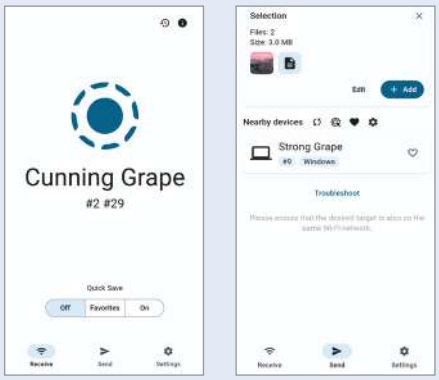
Long-press your home screen and tap the Edit button that appears in the top-left corner. Choose 'Customise' and select Large in the panel that opens. Your app icons will then enlarge and their labels will be hidden. Select 'Small' to restore them.



BEST APPS FOR... Sending large files without email

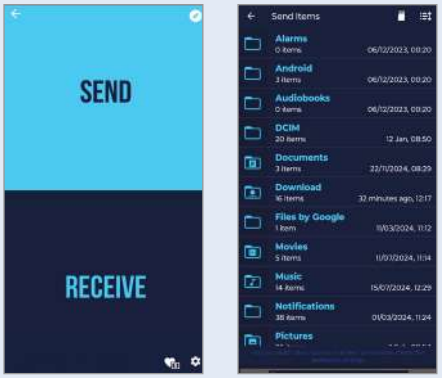
LocalSend

Free
Android www.snipca.com/53873
iOS www.snipca.com/53874
This brilliant app lets you share files instantly between your phone, tablet and PC over your Wi-Fi network. LocalSend automatically detects other devices that have its app installed and open, so you can send and receive photos, videos, documents and other items with a single tap. You don't even need to sign up for an account.
Best For Sending to nearby devices



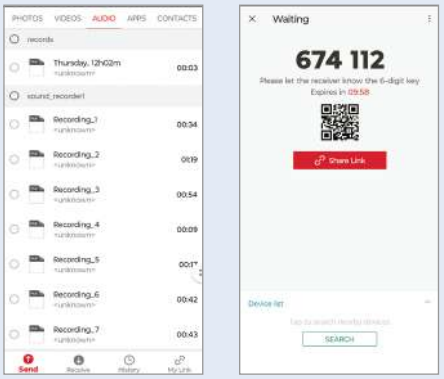
Send Files to TV

Free*
Android www.snipca.com/53880
This app lets you send photos, videos and other large files from your Android phone or tablet to your TV, so you can view them on the big screen. Install its app on your Google/Android or Fire TV device and choose Receive. Now tap Send in the app on your mobile device and select the files to transfer. Pay £2.99 to remove ads.
Best For Sending files to your TV



Send Anywhere

Free*
Android www.snipca.com/53875
iOS www.snipca.com/53876
Since WeTransfer downgraded its free plan to 10 shared files a month, Send Anywhere has become the most flexible file-transfer service. It places no limit on the number of files you can share, provided they're less than 10GB in size. Just send the recipient a link to the shared item, and they can download it by entering a six-digit code.
Best For Sending files to other people



*Contains in-app purchases

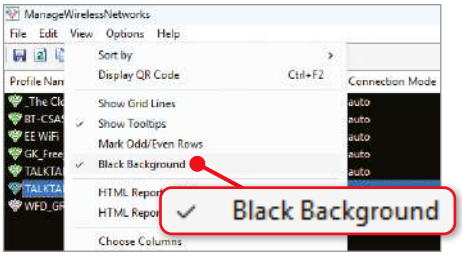
WINDOWS 10 & 11

View your Wi-Fi information in dark mode

You can see your saved Wi-Fi networks by opening Windows settings (press Windows key+I) then clicking 'Network & internet' followed by WiFi then 'Manage known networks'. However, you don't see details such as when you logged on, whether the connection was automatic, or what kind of encryption it uses (if any).

You can see this information in Command Prompt, but it's easier to use NirSoft's superb little tool ManageWirelessNetworks, which has been updated with a dark mode. Download it by clicking the purple download link at the bottom of www.snipca.com/53879. It's safe to use, so if Microsoft Defender shows a 'Windows protected your PC' warning, click 'More info' then 'Run anyway'.

Now click View at the top followed by Black Background (see screenshot below). The background will turn black and the text white. Move the bar at the bottom to see all the information columns the tool shows.



WINDOWS 10 & 11

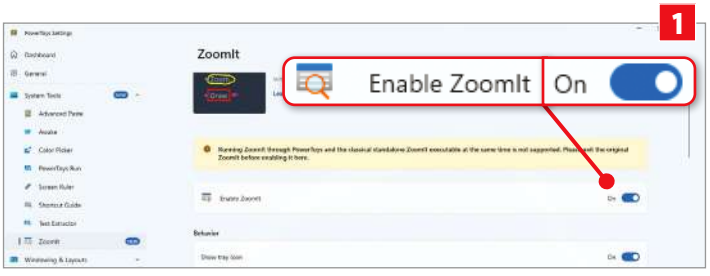
Use sketch pad while presenting

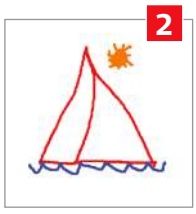
In Issue 704's 'In the Club' (page 48) we explained how to use the new PowerToys tool ZoomIt to zoom and annotate your presentations. One advanced tool it has is a full-screen sketch pad, letting you draw in real time. This is handy when you need to go beyond annotations to provide more visual explanations. Whatever you draw on the pad will be seen by your audience.

Launch PowerToys, then click System Tools followed by ZoomIt. Make sure the 'Enable ZoomIt' slider is on (see screenshot 1 below) then scroll down to the Draw section. Read the instructions for using the sketch pad: press Ctrl+W for a white pad, and Ctrl+K for black. Now press Ctrl+1 to start a zoom and try either of these shortcuts.

You can change the screen pen colour to red (Ctrl+R), green (Ctrl+G), blue (Ctrl+B), orange (Ctrl+O), yellow (Ctrl+Y) or pink (Ctrl+P). Change pen thickness by pressing Ctrl+ arrow keys. In our example, we've attempted a rough logo for a new yachting club 2.

Press Ctrl+Z to undo the last drawing. Close the pad by pressing Escape. You'll then need to press Ctrl+1 again to resume zooming and annotating.



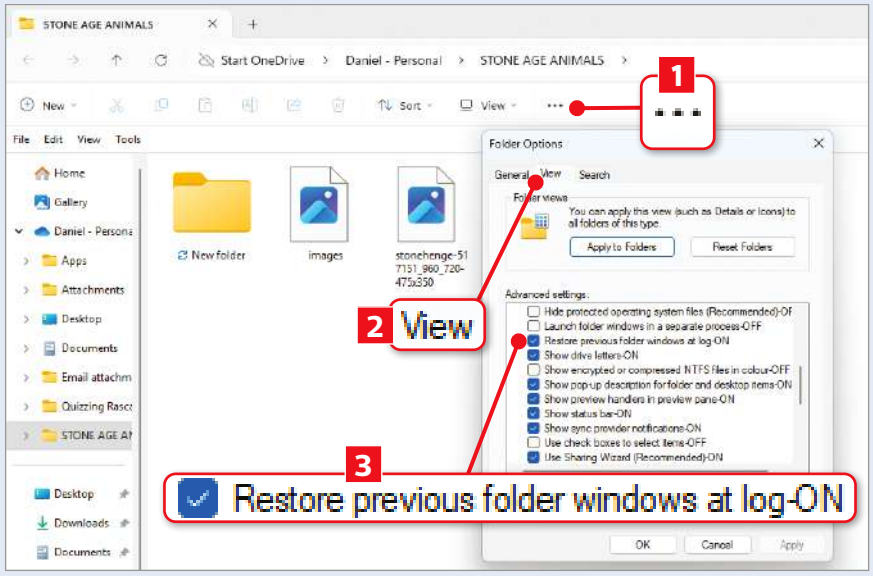


WINDOWS 11

Restore File Explorer tabs when you restart your PC

Microsoft has updated File Explorer so it shows tabs you previously had open when you restart your computer. Open File Explorer then click the menu button (three horizontal dots, 1 in our screenshot) followed by Options. Now click the View tab 2 and tick 'Restore previous folder windows at log-ON' 3. Click OK to confirm.

This option is part of the Windows 11 update KB5050094, and like some others in that update is being rolled out "gradually" to computers. Installing the update takes your computer to build 26100.3037. Check your current build by searching for about in Windows and looking next to 'OS build'.



WINDOWS 10 & 11

Press down right-shift key to turn on Filter Keys

Filter Keys is an accessibility feature that reduces accidental key presses by ignoring repeated or brief keystrokes. It helps users who have difficulties controlling their keyboard, such as people with Parkinson's.

You may know you can turn it on in Windows Settings ('Ease of Access' in Windows 10, Accessibility in 11). But you can also turn it on quickly by pressing down the right Shift key for eight seconds and clicking 'Yes' when prompted. You'll still need to turn it off in Settings.

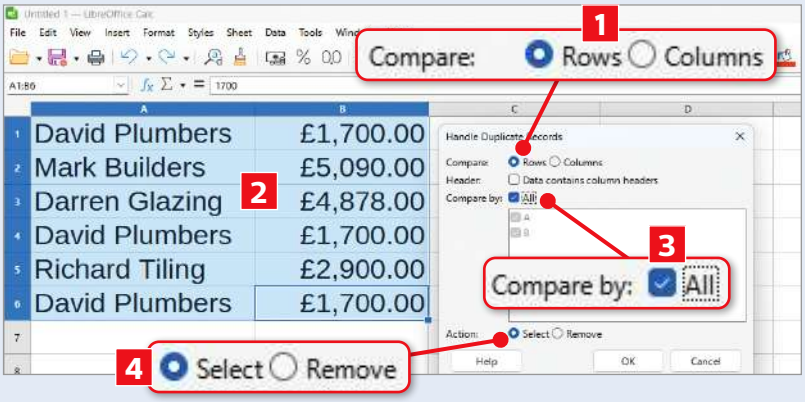
LIBREOFFICE CALC

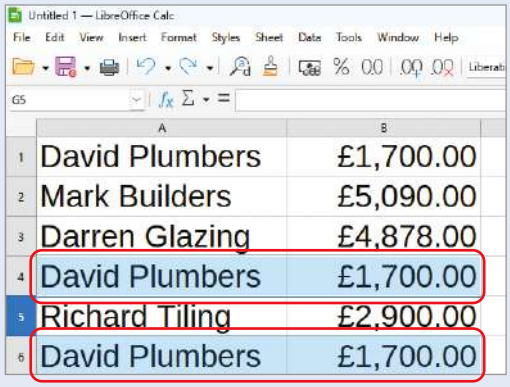
Remove duplicate entries from spreadsheets

In earlier versions of LibreOffice Calc, removing duplicate entries from columns and rows in a spreadsheet meant using the sorting or filtering tools, or typing complex formulas. Version 25.2, released in February, makes this much easier.

Select the cells containing the data, then click Data at the top followed by Duplicates. In the window that opens, next to Compare, select Rows (1 in our screenshot below) if you want to check whether any data in your rows is duplicated (as is the case in our example 2), or Columns to check in those. Tick 'Data contains row headers' if this applies, and 'Compare by: All' to compare all the rows/columns 3.

Finally, choose to select or remove 4 the duplicate entries, then click OK. The former highlights the duplicates with a shaded cell (see screenshot below), while the latter deletes them, leaving only the original.



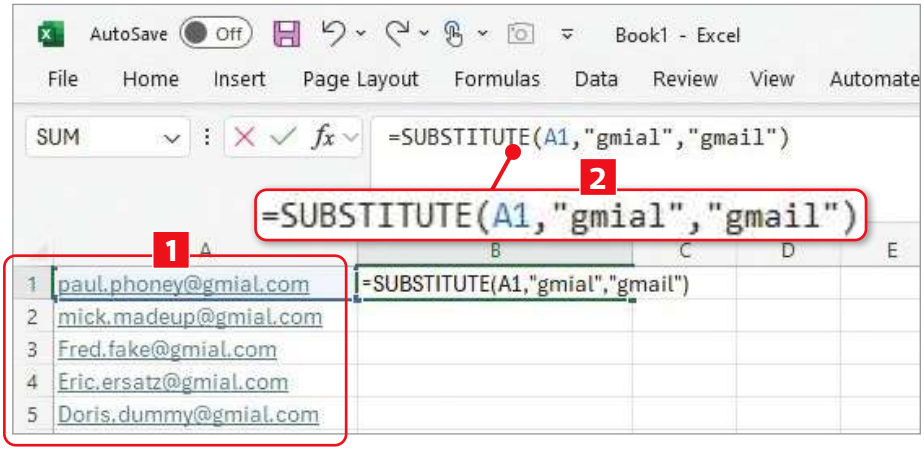


LIBREOFFICE CALC & MICROSOFT EXCEL

Use Substitute function to replace text in cells

The =SUBSTITUTE function looks for specific text in a row or column of cells and replaces it with what you want. In our example, column A is full of email addresses with 'gmail' spelt as 'gmial' (1 in our screenshot below). We want these correctly spelt in column B, so we clicked B1 and typed =SUBSTITUTE(A1,"gmial","gmail") 2. This looks in A1 and replaces the first piece of text between the quotes with the second.

The result will be 'gmail' correctly spelt in B1. Now click in that cell and drag the bottom-right fill handle down (or across if you're replacing text in columns) to cover all the cells you want to replace text in.

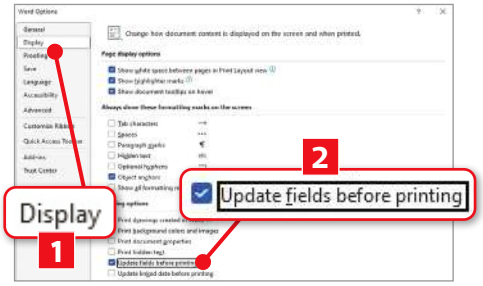


MICROSOFT WORD

Make sure updated dynamic content prints

Documents can have 'dynamic' content that updates based on changes to its structure. For example, a table of contents updates when you add or remove headings, while page numbers adjust when the content changes the document's length. This is incredibly useful, but the updated information may not print unless you turn on a setting in Word's options.

Click File at the top left, then Options



at the bottom of the menu. Now click Display (1 in our screenshot above) and tick 'Update fields before printing' 2. Click OK to confirm. All dynamic content will now be automatically updated, ensuring your print-outs will contain the most up-to-date information.

ONLYOFFICE

Open Apple iWork files in docs, presentations and spreadsheets

Released in early February, version 8.3.0 of OnlyOffice adds compatibility with Apple's iWork tools Keynote, Numbers and Pages. This means files with .key, .numbers and .pages extensions will open in OnlyOffice's presentation, spreadsheet and document editors respectively. To make sure you're using the latest version of OnlyOffice, click About at the bottom left of the main menu followed by 'Check for updates' on the right.

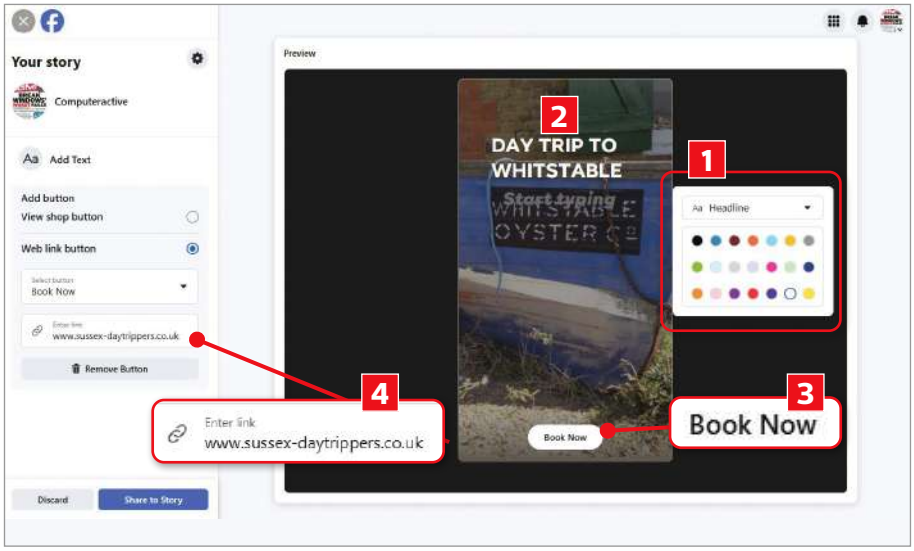
In The Club

Run a club or society? Here's how your tech can make it easier

Promote events with a Facebook Story

If your club has a Facebook page, you probably use the 'What's on your mind?' box at the top to promote events. These can get lost among other posts on your followers' feeds, so for greater prominence and a sense of urgency try creating a Facebook Story instead. These appear at the top of your followers' news feed and in the Messenger app, and can include photos and clickable buttons that link to your website.

Your story will remain in your followers' news feeds for 24 hours, but if you switch on your Story Archive you can save it to repost later. Bear in mind that you can't block specific people from seeing your Story, so once you've made it public, all your followers will see it. You can only create stories from a club page, not your personal profile.



Give your Facebook Story a heading and add a button to take viewers to your club's website

Upload a photo and add text

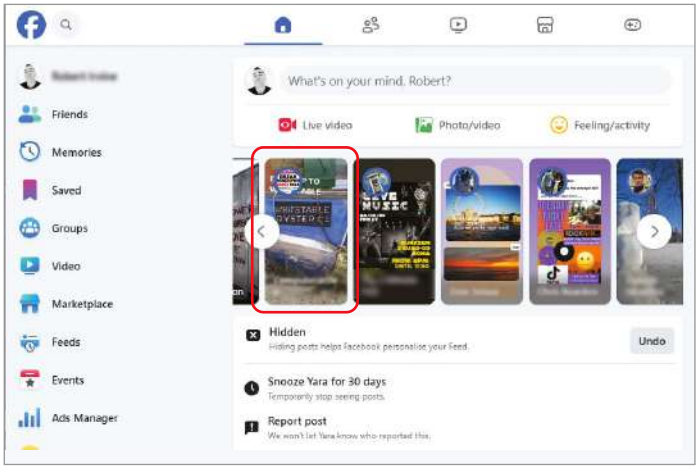
Log into your club's Facebook page then click the Menu button (a grid of nine dots) at the top right. Now click Story followed by 'Create a Photo Story'. Select a photo or image from your PC to upload to your story. Note that the Story box is vertical, so if you upload a photo in landscape orientation, Facebook will crop it to fit the format. For the best results, use photos or videos shot in portrait orientation.

Next, click Add Text on the left then choose a font and colour (1 in screenshot above right) and type a heading for your photo 2. Click on the photo then the heading and move it where you want it. To make it bigger or smaller, drag the points at the corners of the text box. You can also click the photo to move it around, zoom in or out and rotate it.

Next, decide whether you want to add a button that takes members to your club shop on Facebook or to another website, such as your club's official site. We'll do the latter. Click 'Add Button' on the left then 'Web link button'.

Now choose what you want the button to say, such as See More, Learn More or Book Now. You can also select Call Now or Get Directions, but only if your Facebook page contains your phone number or address. The button will appear at the bottom of the story box on the right 3 and can't be moved. Finally, type your website's address below 4 and click 'Share to Story' at the bottom.

Your story will now appear at the top of your followers' news feed (see screenshot below left), along with stories from other pages they follow. Clicking it will open the story in full, showing the photo and any buttons, polls and music you've added.



Your story will appear in a row at the top of your followers' news feeds

Save your story to repost later

You can save your story and post it again after its 24 hours have elapsed – perhaps updating the text if you like. Click the three horizontal dots at the right of your page then select Story Archive. Now click the top-right Settings (cog) button, then the blue Turn On Story Archive button. You also need to activate the 'Archiving your stories' setting at www.snipca.com/53983.

Once 24 hours have elapsed and your story has expired, return to the Story Archive section then click the Archive menu on the left followed by Story Archive. Select your story, update it if needed, then click 'Share to Story' to publish it for another 24 hours.

Next issue: Pick competition winners at random

What's All the Fuss About...

Grok

Elon Musk's improved AI chatbot wants to steal ChatGPT's crown

What is it?

Grok is Elon Musk's AI chatbot, built to answer questions in a conversational style. It started life in late 2023 as part of X (formerly Twitter) and a website (https://grok.com), and has since evolved into an app (Android www.snipca.com/53890; iOS www.snipca.com/53891).

So it's Musk's answer to ChatGPT?

Yes, though its tone is different. Musk wanted to build a "maximum truth-seeking AI that tries to understand the nature of the universe" that could take on ChatGPT, which he thought was being "trained to be politically correct". Ask Grok to describe its style and it says it "blends the wit and absurdity you'd find in a Douglas Adams novel, mixed with the innovative and forward-thinking spirit of Tony Stark".

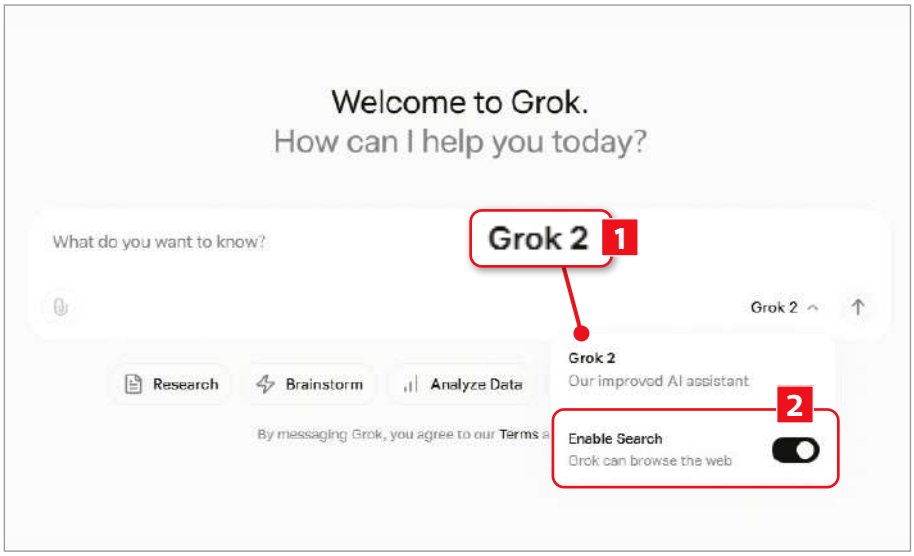
I know who Douglas Adams is, but who's Tony Stark?

He's a billionaire tech entrepreneur who becomes Iron Man in Marvel superhero comics and films. His mission is to use his genius and resources to change the world for the better. Musk has often been compared to Stark – and indeed has proudly compared himself to the character.

Sounds like Grok is made in Musk's self image...

That has some truth to it. He wants it to handle controversial subjects less delicately than ChatGPT and Google Gemini (see page 35), in a style that's bold and provocative, traits that Musk clearly has – love, loathe or ignore him. And now is the perfect time to test it because Grok-2 was made free earlier this year, after first being launched to paid-for subscribers in 2024. It's faster than the first version and gives more precise answers. It's also funnier and less likely to misunderstand jokes or sarcasm.

Unlike ChatGPT, Grok has no qualms breaking copyright to use images like this



Wow. That sounds truly amazing – it *really* does...

Yes, that's the kind of sarcasm Grok-2 should be able to detect. In February, though, it was superseded by Grok-3, which Musk claims is 10 times more powerful. But you'll need to pay for that.

How much?

A whopping £31 a month, as part of X's Premium+ subscription (www.snipca.com/53899). This also removes some adverts from X and boosts the prominence of what you write. But unless you spend every waking hour on X or Grok you really don't need to subscribe.

So how should I try Grok-2?

The easiest way is to visit https://grok.com then type into the box and press Enter. If you want to save your chats you'll need to create an account. You'll notice it's Grok-2 (1 in our screenshot above). Click this then select Enable Search 2 if you want it to search the web for its answer. Whether you do this should depend on the nature of your request, which applies for all AI chatbots.

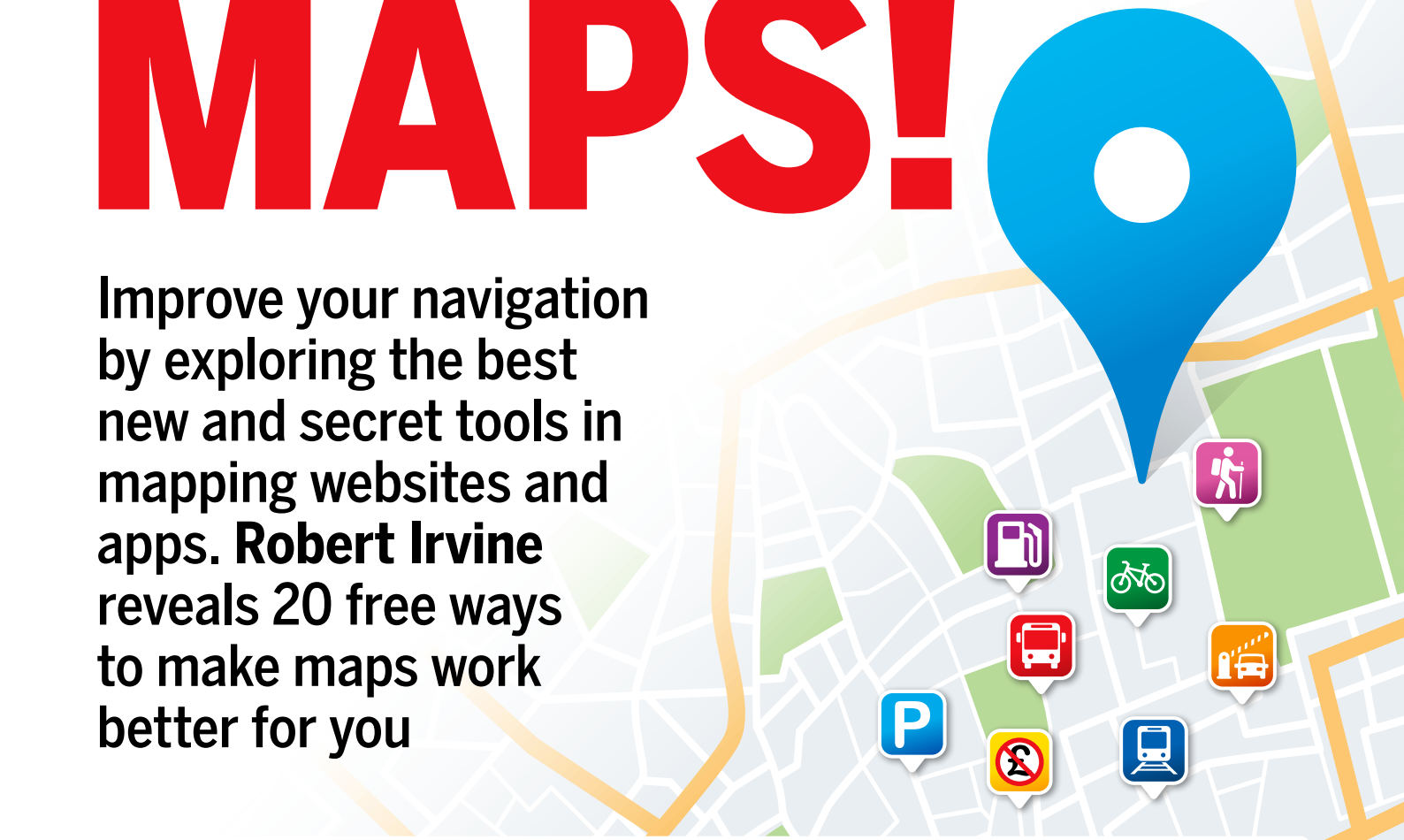
What do you mean?

Well, if you want simple facts you don't need to search the web. Every chatbot should have learned such information from the data it's been fed. For example, ask 'When will support for Windows 10 end?' and it'll give the answer '14 October 2025'. But if you ask a more complex question like 'What happens when Windows 10 support ends?' you'll get more detailed answers if you search the web. This answer will also contain more up-to-date information. Note, though, that it'll take longer because it needs to connect to servers online.

So is it better than ChatGPT?

Not in our tests. They both do the basics well, but Grok is slightly slower, gives less information when searching the web and lacks voice chat. However, you may appreciate that unlike ChatGPT it had no qualms breaking copyright to create images like 'Iron Man arm-wrestling Elon Musk' (pictured left).

HACK YOUR MAPS!



Improve your navigation by exploring the best new and secret tools in mapping websites and apps. **Robert Irvine** reveals 20 free ways to make maps work better for you

Online maps have improved our lives far more than any streaming service or social network. No more struggling with unwieldy road maps, thumbing through street guides and stopping strangers to ask for directions. Now we can simply type our destination and receive instant information on how to get there, how long it will take and where we can grab a coffee on the way.

Google Maps, which celebrated its 20th birthday in February, is undoubtedly the most popular online mapping service, but – as you'll know if you remember Multimap or Streetmap – it wasn't the first, and it certainly isn't perfect. However, it has spurred the development of alternative navigation tools that offer greater privacy, better designs and smarter features. Google even bought one of them, Waze, in 2013.

With so many mapping services to choose from, it's easy to miss some of their most useful options, either because they're new, tucked away or only available in tools you've never tried (or even heard of). In this feature, we reveal our favourite new hacks for online maps to make them work better for you.

We've explored dozens of mapping websites and apps – from the biggest names to lesser-known navigation tools – to bring you the best free ways to enhance your journeys, whether you're travelling by car, bike, public transport or on foot.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

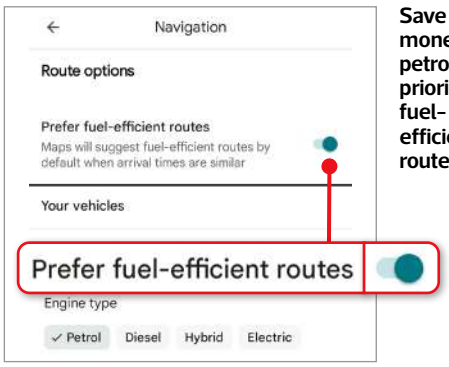
- Plan routes that save you money on petrol or diesel
- Find your way around using augmented reality
- Improve the accuracy of maps that cover your local area
- Turn your phone into a car dashcam
- Enhance map information using layers
- Use a digital compass to help you find your way
- Plan walking and cycling trips around the UK
- Download country maps so you can navigate while offline

MAPPING TOOLS THAT SAVE YOU MONEY

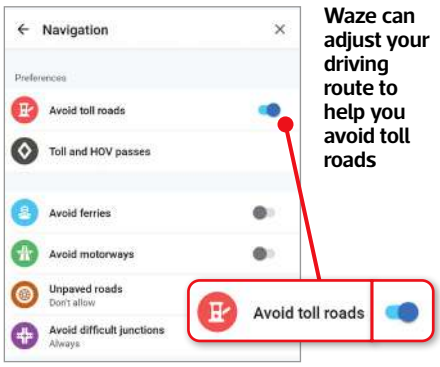
Choose the most fuel-efficient routes

Google Maps now helps you save money on petrol and diesel – or electricity if you drive an electric vehicle – by recommending the most fuel-efficient route. When you search for driving directions in the Maps app, it will automatically suggest the most cost-effective route and highlight it using a leaf symbol. This is based on factors such as the number of hills, condition of the roads and predicted traffic.

To activate the feature, tap your profile picture and choose Settings, then Navigation. In the 'Route options' section, switch on the option 'Prefer fuel-efficient routes' (see screenshot above right). To get more accurate advice for your engine type, select 'My vehicles' in Settings and choose from Petrol, Diesel, Hybrid and Electric. Although you won't save much on shorter journeys, on longer trips it should mean fewer stops at petrol pumps or charging points.



Save money on petrol by prioritising fuel-efficient routes

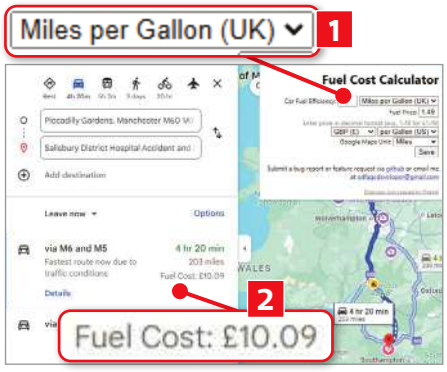


Waze can adjust your driving route to help you avoid toll roads

Calculate petrol costs in advance

Find out how much a car journey will cost by installing the browser extension Google Maps Fuel Cost Calculator (www.snipca.com/53897, Chromium browsers). Enter your vehicle's fuel efficiency in miles per gallon (1 in our screenshot below) or kilometres per litre, and the current price of petrol or diesel, then click Save. When you search for driving directions on the Google Maps site, you'll now see estimated fuel costs for different routes so you can choose the cheapest 2.

The RAC offers a similar 'Mileage calculator' feature on its Route Planner website (www.snipca.com/53898). Enter the details of your journey, engine type and fuel consumption to view the cost for different sizes of vehicle.

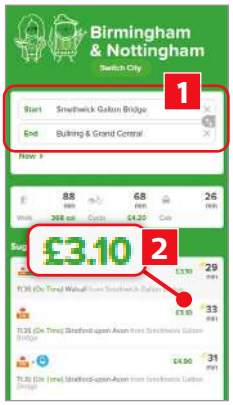


Estimate your petrol costs using Google Maps Fuel Cost Calculator

Compare fares on public transport

The excellent transport app and mapping service Citymapper (www.snipca.com/53894) now lets you compare the fares for public-transport routes around dozens of major UK and European cities. These include London, Birmingham, Lincoln, Liverpool, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Enter your start and end points (1 in our screenshot below), and Citymapper will calculate the cost of your trip via different bus and rail methods 2. The new feature works on the Citymapper website, and in its apps for Android (www.snipca.com/53895) and iOS (www.snipca.com/53896), and also tells you when and where to catch the bus or train, and the estimated duration of your journey.



Citymapper tells you the cheapest public-transport routes in major cities

Additionally, Citymapper now suggests step-free routes that include stations with lifts or ramps, or that have no stairs.

Avoid paying toll charges

There are 23 toll roads, tunnels and bridges in the UK, plus congestion-charge zones in London and Durham, while other countries have even more (France has over 90). Avoiding their charges can mean taking a detour that costs you even more in petrol, but it's worth checking if you can adjust your route or should switch to public transport.

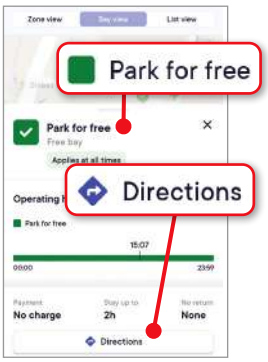
Waze (www.waze.com) includes the useful option to bypass toll roads and congestion-charge zones when planning your journey. Tap the three-line menu button in the top-left corner of the Waze app and choose Settings then Navigation. Switch on the 'Avoid toll roads' option (see screenshot above). When tolls are unavoidable on your route, Waze will tell you how much they cost.

In Google Maps, go to the 'Route options' section of your Navigation settings and select 'Avoid toll roads'. And in Apple Maps, tap your account icon, select Preferences and switch on 'Avoid tolls'.

Find free parking spaces

AppyParking+ for Android (www.snipca.com/53900) and iOS (www.snipca.com/53901) saves you money by revealing where you can park for free without getting a ticket. Its maps cover more than 450 towns and cities in the UK, and mark free parking spaces with a green tick.

Tap one for information, including available hours, maximum stay time and a Street View image of the spot. Press the Directions button (see screenshot right) to find out how to get there using your preferred mapping app. AppyParking+ lets you specify how far you're prepared to walk from the space to your destination, the type of vehicle you're driving and whether you have a blue badge.



AppyParking+ reveals where you can park your car for free

You can use the free-parking search and all the app's other features for 30 days, after which it costs £4.99 a month or 99p for a one-day pass. It's still free to find paid parking bays after the trial ends.

BEST NEW WAYS TO EXPLORE THE WORLD

Explore the world at street level

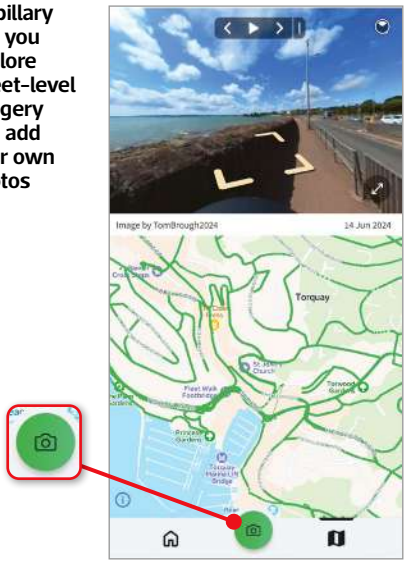
We're all familiar with Google Street View, but it's not the only way to explore areas at street level using panoramic imagery. Apple's equivalent feature, Look Around, was recently added to the new web-based version of Apple Maps (www.snipca.com/53903), though sadly its UK coverage is currently limited to London and Edinburgh.

Microsoft's Streetside tool in Bing Maps is a closer rival to Street View, but much of its imagery is outdated and low quality. A better alternative is Mapillary (www.mapillary.com), which specialises in street-level imagery.

Mapillary doesn't send fleets of camera-equipped cars to capture the world, but invites users to upload their own photos to its database of more than two billion. These are then combined with its maps to provide collaborative, street-level views – to which you can add your own shots by tapping the camera button (see screenshot below left).

Mapillary isn't as comprehensive or slick as Street View, but its crowdsourced nature provides a personal perspective that reaches some areas Google hasn't. Its Android app (www.snipca.com/53904) has a mediocre rating (2.8), but was redesigned last year, along with the iOS version (www.snipca.com/53905), to fix bugs and improve uploads.

Other free services for exploring the world at street level include Mapilio (www.snipca.com/53906) and KartaView (www.snipca.com/53907), which – like Mapillary – can be used in your desktop browser and their respective mobile apps.



Mapillary lets you explore street-level imagery and add your own photos

Get real-time walking directions using augmented reality

One problem with using mapping apps for walking directions is that areas look very different in the real world than they do in 2D from above. To help you get your bearings, the Google Maps app now offers Live View, which combines augmented reality (AR) with Street View imagery.

Live View overlays direction arrows, distance markers and information about local businesses on whatever you're currently seeing in front of you. It only works in areas with good Street View coverage, and on phones that support Google's ARCore AR technology (see the list of compatible devices at www.snipca.com/53908).

To use Live View, search for a destination in Google Maps, tap Directions, then choose Walking. Press the Live View button at the bottom of the screen, tap Start then point your phone's camera at buildings or signs in front of you. Once Live View identifies your position, it will overlay your surroundings with arrows (see screenshot above) to guide you in the right direction, and provide other useful information.

Google Maps Live View uses augmented reality to provide walking directions

Your phone will vibrate when you reach the next navigation step or your destination. Switch back to the 2D map view by tilting your phone horizontally.

Explore areas in 3D

Although Google Maps and Apple Maps both offer 3D options that let you view the approximate dimensions of buildings and other structures, they're pretty basic. Both companies limit their fanciest 3D technology to their respective Immersive View and Flyover modes, which provide photorealistic tours of famous landmarks and major world cities.

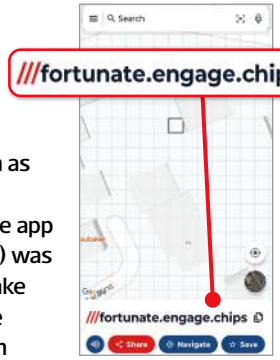
Magic Earth for Android (www.snipca.com/53909) and iOS (www.snipca.com/53910) provides a much better use of 3D maps. This free app's 'elevated mapping experience' uses 3D by default, but switches to 2D when you tap a location to zoom in. When you're driving straight ahead, Magic Earth will display the road in front of you in 3D, then move to 2D when you approach a junction or turn. If you'd prefer to stick with one mode, tap the Settings cog (see screenshot left) in the top-left corner and choose Navigation. Tap '2D/3D Map' and select one or the other.

Magic Earth switches between 2D and 3D mode automatically

Find precise places faster in What3words

What3words is renowned for its unique approach to navigation. It divides the planet into three-metre squares, and gives each a unique address based on three random words, such as 'fortunate.engage.chips'.

The What3words mobile app (www.snipca.com/53910) was recently redesigned to make it easier to jump to precise places. It now has a search box at the top, into which you can type a postal or What3words address, to display it on the map below. You can also use voice search to speak the three words, or scan the details with your phone's camera.



Other improvements include clearer presentation of What3words addresses, and a new Copy button on the right (see screenshot) for saving them to your clipboard.

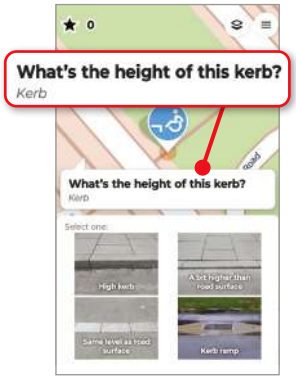
IMPROVE THE QUALITY AND DETAIL OF MAPS

Improve the quality of OpenStreetMap data

Many free navigation apps source their mapping data from OpenStreetMap (OSM, www.openstreetmap.org) rather than Google Maps. This free database is maintained by a huge community of volunteers and allows app developers to use its maps however they want, instead of paying for – and being restricted by – the Google Maps API.

For map users, OpenStreetMap data has the benefit of being constantly updated and checked by the OSM community, which makes it extensive, accurate and detailed. You can contribute your own local knowledge by installing StreetComplete (www.snipca.com/53914).

This free Android app detects missing OpenStreetMap data in your vicinity, such as bike lanes, opening hours and street numbers. These are marked on your area map as 'quests', which you complete by adding the missing details – then log into OSM later to publish them.



Add missing local data to maps using the fun free app StreetComplete

Missions include providing the names of churches, reporting the height of kerbs (see screenshot left), identifying bollard types and specifying whether a bus stop has a shelter, bench or rubbish bin. StreetComplete is friendly and fun (provided you watch where you're walking), and a great way to get into OSM mapping without any expertise.

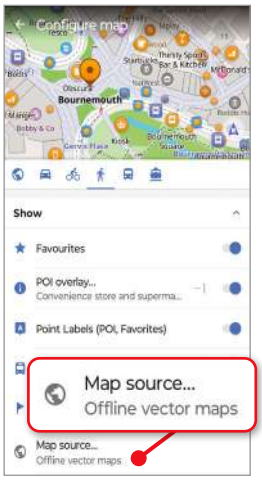
An iOS version is currently in development. Until it's released, you can use the similar app Go Map (www.snipca.com/53916).

Add extra layers of information to maps

Most mapping apps offer a choice of layers, which let you customise their view or overlay extra visual information. Common examples include Aerial/Satellite, Public Transport and Terrain – though you may need to pay for some layers, such as the Topographic option in Ordnance Survey's OS Maps app (see page 56).

One of the most generous apps for free layers is OsmAnd for Android (www.snipca.com/53917) and iOS (www.snipca.com/53918). Based on OpenStreetMap data, this provides lots of ways to make maps more detailed and informative. Tap the three-line menu button and choose 'Configure map' (download the map for your area if prompted) to display an array of useful data. This includes points of interest; cycling, running and public-transport routes; and street-level imagery from Mapillary (see previous page).

To get the latter you need to tap 'Map source' (see screenshot below), install the 'Online maps' plug-in, followed by the Mapillary plug-in. Tap 'Map source' again and choose 'Add more' for dozens of additional layers from other mapping services. Some OsmAnd layers, including Weather, Topography and 'Nautical depth', require a Pro subscription, which costs £2.99 a month.

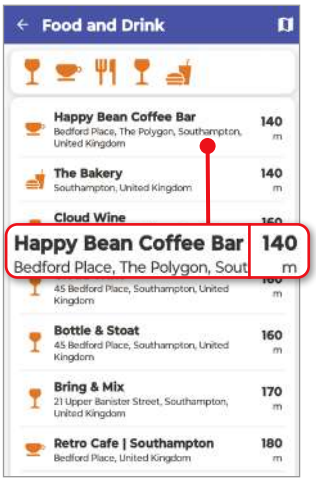


OsmAnd lets you enhance its maps using a wide variety of layers

Google Maps finally added the weather forecast to its Android app last year (it was already available on iOS), and also has a helpful 'Air quality' layer. This sources air-quality-index (AQI) data from environmental agencies then uses colour-coding (green for low risk of pollutants, red for high) to indicate air quality in different areas.

Find nearby amenities without bias

When you search for shops, restaurants, accommodation and other amenities in Google Maps, its results are ranked by 'relevance'. This prioritises businesses that comply with certain Google rules, such as providing photos and up-to-date information, and having positive customer reviews.



Find nearby amenities without Google's bias by using Magic Earth

We prefer the unbiased approach of Magic Earth, which lists its 'Points of interest' results by distance (see screenshot left). Tap the search box above the map and choose a category such as 'Food and Drink', Accommodation, Medical Services, Shopping or Sightseeing. Select an entry to jump straight to it on the map, then get directions for your intended transport method.

We also like the similar feature in Organic Maps for Android (www.snipca.com/53920) and iOS (www.snipca.com/53921). This brilliant free app additionally includes ATMs, recycling points and – best of all – toilets among its amenity categories.

Rename the 'Gulf of America'

Google Maps, Apple Maps and Bing Maps have renamed the 'Gulf of Mexico' the 'Gulf of America', following an executive order by President Trump in February. To poke fun at the controversial move, rival mapping service MapQuest has launched an online tool called 'Gulf of Map Explorer', which lets you call the gulf whatever you want.

Enter your preferred name at www.snipca.com/53922, click Generate and the map will update accordingly. You can then download your custom map to share with other people. No prizes for guessing what we've called our gulf!

Computer active

READER OFFER!

ADD A DISC FOR £5.95

Upgrade to Windows 11 Pro for just £49.99!

Your PC almost certainly came with Windows 11 Home. But did you know it's easy to upgrade to **Windows 11 Pro** to get advanced features like BitLocker drive encryption?

There's no need to install a new version of Windows – just take your new Professional key, go to System, Activate, then select 'Change Product Key'.

To upgrade, visit **www.snipca.com/50563** and click the red **Buy Now** button on the right.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

This offer can be used by one person only, and expires at midnight on **25 March, 2025**.
It's a lifetime licence for one computer.

BECOME A SMARTER AND SAFER DRIVER

Get live and historical info about road hazards

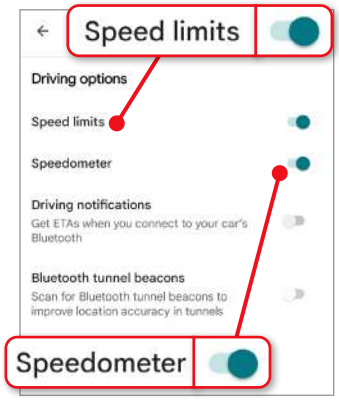
Waze constantly analyses driving conditions to help you avoid tailbacks, roadworks and other hazards such as potholes, broken traffic lights and even bad weather. Information is provided and verified by Waze users, then shared to the app to provide almost real-time updates.

Over the past year, Waze has been updated with even more useful data, including alerts for speed bumps and sharp curves. It also now helps you navigate tricky roundabouts by telling you which lane to choose and where to exit, so you won't miss your turn.

We particularly like the 'crash history' feature, which alerts you when you drive into an area with a history of road accidents. This option should be enabled by default, but you can check by pressing the three-line menu button and selecting 'Alerts and reports' then Reports. Tap 'History of accidents' (see screenshot above) and switch on 'Alert while driving'.

Waze alerts you when you're approaching an accident blackspot

The Reports screen also includes Waze's new 'School zones' option. This notifies you about nearby schools, both on the map and as an alert, so you can follow specific speed restrictions and be aware of increased pedestrian activity.



Google Maps warns you when you're exceeding the speed limit

Stay within the speed limit

Last summer, Google Maps updated its iOS app with two speed-related features that were already available in its Android version and in Waze. One displays a speedometer on the map to show how fast you're driving, while the other warns you when you exceed the speed limit.

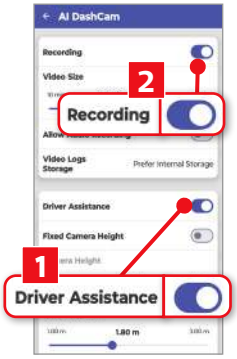
To activate these features in the Google Maps app, tap your profile picture and select Settings then Navigation. Swipe down to the 'Driving options' section and switch on 'Speed limits' and 'Speedometer' (see screenshot above). Both features work with Android Auto and Apple CarPlay, so you won't need to keep glancing at your phone.

Google says the speedometer is for "informational use only" and that you should use your vehicle's speedometer to confirm your actual driving speed. Its speed-limit information combines data from local authorities with Street View imagery and AI models, allowing it to update limits based on traffic and weather conditions, so you shouldn't fall foul of variable speed limits.

Turn your phone or tablet into a dashcam

Magic Earth includes a handy safety feature for drivers called AI DashCam (www.snipca.com/53923). Designed for vehicles that don't have Advanced Driver Assistance System (ADAS) built in, it helps you avoid collisions and accidents by alerting you to potential problems and lane changes.

Best of all, AI DashCam lets you use your mobile device's rear camera to record the road in front of you. This in effect turns your phone or tablet into a dashcam, giving you recorded evidence if you're involved in an accident or altercation.

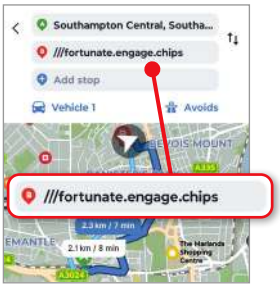


Magic Earth's AI Dashcam records what happens on the road ahead

To enable the feature, tap Magic Earth's menu button and select AI DashCam. Switch on Driver Assistance (1 in our screenshot above left) to receive information about road hazards, and Recording 2 to capture video footage. You can specify the maximum length and size of the video, and opt to record audio too.

Drive to precise locations using What3words

In January, Sygic GPS Navigation (www.snipca.com/53925) added the useful ability to search for locations using What3words. This makes it easier to drive to people who don't know the address of their current whereabouts, or are waiting somewhere with no notable landmarks.

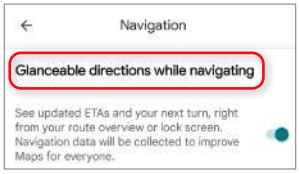


Sygic GPS Navigation now supports What3words addresses

Simply type the three-word What3words address (see screenshot above) into the Sygic app's search box, select the location and tap Get Directions. The feature works best if the person is close to a road because Sygic doesn't provide walking directions.

View directions on your lock screen

Another Waze feature that's now available in Google Maps lets you view directions on your lock screen. This saves you having to unlock your phone or tablet when using the app to navigate while driving, so you can keep your hands on the wheel.


Navigation
Glanceable directions while navigating
See updated ETAs and your next turn, right from your route overview or lock screen. Navigation data will be collected to improve Maps for everyone.

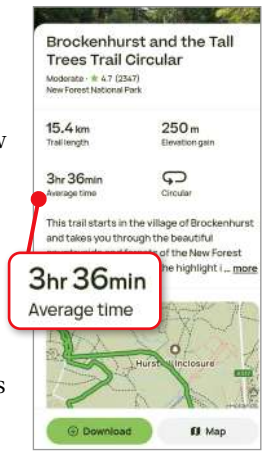
The new option is called 'glanceable directions' and its lock-screen widget automatically updates your location, remaining distance and estimated time of arrival. However, unlike in Waze (and Apple Maps) it's disabled by default.

To enable it, tap your profile picture and choose Settings then Navigation. Swipe down to 'Glanceable directions while navigating' and switch the option on (see screenshot). The feature is also useful when walking or cycling, as you won't need to keep stopping to unlock and check your phone, exposing it to passing thieves.

PLAN BETTER WALKING AND CYCLING ROUTES

Get inspiration for walking and hiking routes

If you want to go out for a stroll or hike but don't know where, AllTrails can provide you with inspiration. This superbly designed app for Android (www.snipca.com/53936) and iOS (www.snipca.com/53937) – you can also use its website at www.alltrails.com – features 450,000 curated trails from around the world, and suggests the best routes near you.

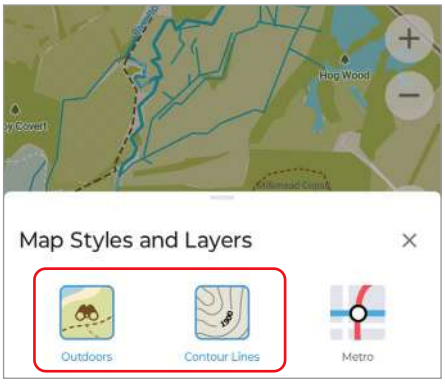


AllTrails suggests the best walking trails near where you live

You can choose the style of trail – such as 'Among trees', 'Epic views' and 'Dog friendly' – then tap a marker on the map to view full details. These include the length, average duration and elevation of the walk, stunning photos showing you what to expect and reviews from other AllTrails users.

Tap the bookmark button to save the trail to your favourites and 'Get directions' to open turn-by-turn directions in Google Maps or Apple Maps. To download and print maps, preview trails as 3D walkthroughs and view lots of additional information, you need to subscribe to AllTrails+ for £35.99 a year, following a seven-day free trial.

If that subscription is a dealbreaker, consider planning your hikes and rides through Organic Maps (see page 53). Although this completely free app doesn't suggest trails, its walking and cycling route planners let you add multiple stops, and its Outdoors and Contour Lines layers (see screenshot below) add helpful details to its maps, such as the locations of paths, water sources and shelters, and how steep or gentle the terrain is.



The Outdoors layer in Organic Maps shows useful info for hiking

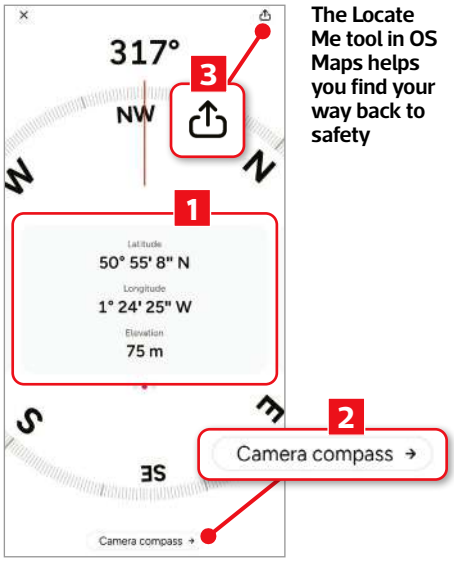
You can also download maps of different regions to explore offline – see opposite page for more on this topic. Unlike Google Maps, Organic Maps doesn't track you or clutter its maps with unnecessary icons.

Use OS Maps' Locate Me tool if you're lost

Ordnance Survey's OS Maps app for Android (www.snipca.com/53933) and iOS (www.snipca.com/53934) provides comprehensive, high-quality maps for exploring the UK by foot or bike. Although some features – including 3D mode, the Topographic layer and offline maps – are limited to its paid-for version (£6.99 per month or £34.99 or year), the free app includes its splendid route planner and unrivalled geographic detail.

Last July, Ordnance Survey shut down its separate OS Locate app and integrated its features into a new Locate Me option in OS Maps. This tool, which you access by tapping the three-dot icon in the top-right of the app, lets you quickly pinpoint your location when you've strayed from your path and aren't sure where you are.

Locate Me's digital compass provides latitude, longitude and elevation data (1 in our screenshot below), and you can switch to a 'Camera compass' 2 to help you navigate back to safety. This uses augmented reality to superimpose a compass over your camera's viewfinder, so you can point your phone in the direction you're walking and ensure you're heading the right way.



The Locate Me tool in OS Maps helps you find your way back to safety

The feature doesn't require a mobile signal because OS Maps has a built-in GPS system that works even in the most remote areas. Locate Me also lets you share your location 3 with friends, family and the emergency services through messaging or social-media apps.

Plan easy cycling journeys across the UK

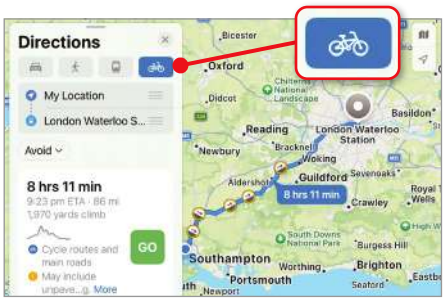
Google Maps has long provided cycling directions, along with a Cycling layer that indicates bike lanes and paths using black lines. In February, Apple Maps caught up by expanding its formerly London-centric cycling routes to cover most of the UK and Ireland.

This means cyclists with iPhones and iPads can now plan full journeys around the UK (though not multi-stage routes). Route information includes distance, estimated time of arrival and elevation, plus warnings about unpaved roads.

To use the feature, simply tap the bicycle icon in the Directions panel in Apple Maps (see screenshot below). You can opt to avoid busy roads and hills by tapping your profile icon and choosing Preferences.

For a dedicated cycling assistant, install Cycle.travel for Android (www.snipca.com/53931) and iOS (www.snipca.com/53932). Unlike many cycling apps, this free app doesn't bombard you with social features or restrict its best options to a paid-for version.

Instead it provides a simple way to plan bike journeys around the UK and abroad, using OpenStreetMap data. Cycle.travel provides visual and spoken turn-by-turn directions, suggests paved, gravel and night routes, and lets you download its maps to use offline. You can also find amenities along your route, including food shops, pharmacies, cycle parking, toilets and drinking water.



Apple Maps has extended its cycling directions to cover most of the UK

DOWNLOAD MAPS TO NAVIGATE OFFLINE

Download Google and Apple maps to use offline

Most navigation apps now let you download their maps to explore offline, for when you can't get a reliable internet connection. Offline maps are also useful when you don't want to exceed your mobile data allowance or incur roaming charges for using data while abroad.

Many apps that use OpenStreetMap – including Magic Earth, Organic Maps and OsmAnd – let you download maps of specific regions and even entire countries for free. In some cases, you need to download a map before you can use the service – save it to your SD card if possible, as the files can be very large. Others limit offline maps to their paid-for subscriptions, as an incentive to upgrade.

Google Maps lets you download area maps for offline use

Google Maps offers two free ways to download maps for offline exploration. When you search for and select a town, city, county or country, tap its name at the bottom of the app to open the Details panel. Tap the More button in the row of options and select 'Download offline map'. Highlight the precise area you want to save – you can zoom in or out as required – then tap Download (see screenshot above).

Alternatively, tap your profile icon in the top-right corner of the Google Maps app and choose 'Offline maps'. Either pick one of Google's suggested places – such as Work or Home – or press 'Select your own map' to save a custom area. To download maps to your SD card, tap the Settings cog top-right, choose 'Storage preferences' and select 'SD card' rather than Device.

In Apple Maps (which only added offline maps in iOS 17), tap your profile icon and select Offline Maps then Add. Start typing the name of a place or area, choose the relevant result, then drag the selection box over the part of the map you want to save. Tap the Download button to save the map to your iPhone or iPad.

Switch to offline maps automatically

Here WeGo for Android (www.snipca.com/53940) and iOS (www.snipca.com/53941) was one of the first free mapping apps to offer map downloads, and last November it added a handy automatic offline mode. This automatically switches to using offline maps when you lose your internet connection, so you don't need to load them manually.

You need to download the maps in advance, but can do so to your SD card by selecting 'Storage media' then SD Card (1 in our screenshot above) on Here WeGo's 'Download maps' screen. Press the 'Download maps' button 2, tap a continent and choose the country you want to navigate offline. You can either download a map for the entire United Kingdom (949MB) or one of the individual four nations, Jersey or Guernsey. ca

Download Here WeGo's country maps to use automatically offline

Create your own maps using AI

Google has already added some AI features to Maps in the US, allowing users to ask its AI assistant Gemini for information and recommendations. But several new mapping tools are offering more creative cartographic uses for AI.

We particularly like PamPam (www.snipca.com/53942), which generates simple maps from text prompts. Enter a theme, such as 'things to do in Birmingham', 'best chip shops in Blackpool' or 'Roman invasion of Britain', and PamPam will use data from Wikipedia and ChatGPT to create a map of relevant 'spots'. Each 'spot' has a marker you can click for more details, and you can share your map with other people (see screenshot). PamPam's free plan limits you to 30 spots per map, but if you need more you can pay $12 (£9.50) per month for its Pro version.

Textomap (www.textomap.com) generates maps by identifying the locations and landmarks in text you enter – including content from web pages, spreadsheets and ChatGPT chats. Its free plan lets you create as many maps as you want, but you can only save 10 per month.

NEXT ISSUE On sale Wednesday 26 March

ON SALE Weds 26 Mar

THE COMPLETE AI GUIDE
20 tools you MUST use – and 20 you NEVER SHOULD

PLUS
- Send messages to yourself It's better than taking notes
- Keep your files encrypted It's not just emails you need to protect

Subscribe to Computeractive at www.getcomputeractive.co.uk

SUBSCRIBE TODAY

DON'T LET GOOGLE 'FINGERPRINT' YOU
We blocked it as soon as we could! p60
BUY THIS SMART PLUG
Cheap but powerful p28
Computer active
ISSUE 703 | 12 – 25 FEBRUARY 2025
Miss Daisy drives scammers mad – page 9
Learn something new in every issue
NEVER LOSE WI-FI
Set up mobile hotspots on your PC & phone p35
BREAK WINDOWS' WORST RULES
Do what Microsoft REALLY doesn't want you to – take back control! p50
Beat Windows 11's upgrade specs
Open files that Windows locks
Remove Edge and the new Outlook
Delay updates to avoid problems
Run Windows without a product key
Is Microsoft keeping you signed in?
£3.20
PLUS
BACK UP & PRINT YOUR TEXT MESSAGES page 62
STOP USING P
ON YOUR PHON
Switch to passkeys –
WIPE DATA FROM YOUR OLD PHONES
They need more than a factory reset page 60
Computer act
Who needs £598m anyway? Page 8
WHY YOU
Cha
Best ways this an
IMPROVE YOUR LIF
Get instant answers to a
Summarise long docs in
Write complaint letters t
Create images quickly fr
No ads in results (ditch
Everything you can do F
PLUS
REMOVE COPILOT FROM YOUR COMPUTER
And other Microsoft junk p74
VE OLD BOOK POSTS
d we did! page 74
DOWNLOAD BBC TV & YOUTUBE
Superb NEW tool that beats every restriction page 38
ourite
VARE
LED!
SAVE 35%*

3 EASY WAYS TO SUBSCRIBE

magazinesdirect.com/CAC/DJ24K

0330 333 1113 Quote Offer Code: DJ24K

Scan me

SAVE 35%*

PRINT EDITION

£25.26

every 6 months

Best Free Software
ShareX 17
Computer active
WHY YOU MUST USE
ChatGPT
Best ways this amazing new AI tool will IMPROVE YOUR LIFE!
Get instant answers to anything
Summarise long docs in seconds
Write complaint letters that work
Create images quickly from text
No ads in results (ditch Google!)
Everything you can do FOR FREE!
STOP SPAM!
WIPE DATA FROM YOUR OLD PHONES
AVOID LANDLINE SWITCH-OFF SCAMS
DON'T UPGRADE TO WINDOWS 11 24H2
PLUS REMOVE COPILOT FROM YOUR COMPUTER

DIGITAL EDITION

£20.21

every 6 months

Other great reasons to subscribe

- Get all the tips, product reviews and security updates early
- Never miss an issue and get the handiest technology magazine delivered straight to your door every 2 weeks.
- Get access to our product reviews, money saving tips and recommendations early

Offer closes 7 May 2025. Price is guaranteed for the first 6 months, please allow up to 6 weeks for the delivery of your first subscription issue (up to 8 weeks overseas) the full subscription rate is for 6 months and includes postage and packaging. *Savings are based on the cover price. Payment is non-refundable after the 14-day cancellation period. For full terms and conditions, visit www.magazinesdirect.com/terms. For enquiries and overseas rates please call: +44 (0) 330 333 1113. Lines are open Monday-Friday 8:30am-7pm, Saturday 10am-3pm UK Time (excluding Bank Holidays) or email: help@magazinesdirect.com. Calls to 0330 numbers will be charged at no more than a national landline call, and may be included in your phone provider's call bundle. Please allow 28 days for delivery, UK only. Future Publishing Limited reserves the right to limit offers of this kind to one per household.

Beat Microsoft's Office price rise

Microsoft 365 subscribers are about to see a huge hike in fees just for the privilege of using of Copilot. **Jonathan Parkyn** explains how to beat this rise, and pay only for features you want

If you use Microsoft 365 – the company's subscription-based way of paying for Office apps and additional OneDrive storage – you may have received an email telling you that the cost of your subscription is set to rise. Some of you may already be paying more, because the price rise comes into effect automatically on your first billing date after 16 January 2025, if your account is set to renew automatically.

It's a hefty price increase, too. Microsoft 365 Personal subscribers will see their fees jump from £5.99 to £8.49 per month, or from £59.99 to £84.99 if they pay yearly. Microsoft 365 Family subscribers will now pay £10.49 per month (up from £7.99) or £104.99 (up from £79.99) per year. To put it another way, 365 Personal subscribers are looking at a staggering 42-per-cent increase, while 365 Family subscribers will be paying 31-per-cent more.

Check whether you're affected

If you haven't noticed an email from Microsoft, sign into your Microsoft account at https://account.microsoft.com, then click Subscriptions on the left to see if you'll be paying more. If you see Microsoft 365 Personal or Microsoft 365 Family listed, click it to see whether Auto-renew is enabled and how much your next payment will be.

Click 'Manage' to see your account if you bought Microsoft 365 from a third party

If you've subscribed to Microsoft 365 through a third-party provider such as Amazon or Currys, clicking Manage (see screenshot below left) on your Microsoft account page will take you to your provider's website. Here you can check whether billing for your 365 subscription is set to recur automatically and if your next payment has increased.

Why is Microsoft raising prices?

Microsoft says the price rise is necessary to "continue evolving the benefits included with your subscription and ensure Microsoft customers are among the first to access powerful AI features in our apps". Loosely translated, this means the company is forcing you to pay for the recent addition of AI tools Copilot and Designer, whether you want them or not.

Microsoft has already added its AI assistant Copilot to the latest versions of many of its Office apps. This can help you write or summarise text in Word documents, for example, or analyse data in Excel spreadsheets. Assuming your Office apps are up to date, you'll find the Copilot icon in the top-right corner of each program window.

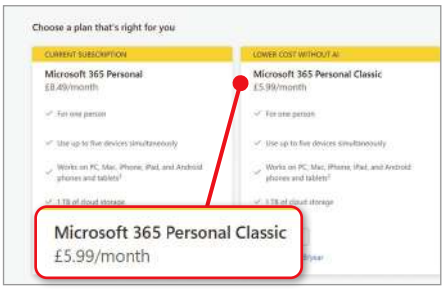
Designer, meanwhile, is a generative AI tool that lets you create images, including invitations, greetings cards, logos and more, simply by typing a description of what you want. Access it by signing in with your Microsoft 365 account at https://designer.microsoft.com or through its apps for iOS and Android. We explained how to use it in Issue 691's 'In the Club' section (page 48).

For some, these new features may feel useful enough to warrant the increased cost. But what if you don't want or need these tools and see no reason why you should have to pay for them? Thankfully, there are several options available for those who want to avoid paying Microsoft's AI tax.

Switch to a cheaper 'Classic' subscription

Dig around on Microsoft's support site and you'll discover how to downgrade your 365 subscription to 'Classic' versions of the Personal and Family plans. Head to www.snipca.com/53945 and you'll see that they offer almost exactly the same benefits as the standard plans but without AI tools and – crucially – with no price hike.

However, the option to switch to a classic subscription isn't easy to find. Sign in at https://account.microsoft.com and click Manage, then 'Cancel subscription', at which point the site should give you the option to select Microsoft 365 Personal Classic (see screenshot above right) or Microsoft 365 Family Classic. Family subscribers may need to re-add



You can switch to Microsoft 365 Personal Classic for £5.99, but it might not last long

family members to the subscription once they've switched to a classic plan. Note that Microsoft says Classic versions of 365 will be available "for a limited time", which suggests the company will scrap them at some point.

Switch to a non-subscription version of Office

If you want to cancel your Microsoft 365 subscription for good, you can still buy Office with a one-off payment. You can then download the software suite without any of the unwanted AI features. The current edition, Microsoft Office Home 2024, includes full versions of Word, Excel, PowerPoint and OneNote. You can buy it from Microsoft for £120, but it's usually available for slightly less from third-party sellers such as our own Software Store, where it costs £109.99 (www.snipca.com/53968, see screenshot below).

There are a few downsides for anyone switching from a 365 subscription. With an Office Home 2024 licence you can only install the apps on a single computer, and the suite doesn't include any additional OneDrive cloud storage. What's more, Microsoft will stop updating Office Home 2024 with features and security fixes on 9 October 2029 (see www.snipca.com/53946). That still works out a lot cheaper than four-and-a-half years of Microsoft 365 subscription fees, though.

Older versions of Office are still available, often very cheaply. You can currently pick up Office 2021 for as little as £47 from Amazon (www.snipca.com/53969), for instance. Microsoft will axe support for this version on 13 October 2026, however. We'd strongly advise against buying any edition of Office 2016 or 2019 at this point, too, as support for both ends on 14 October 2025.

***Computeractive*'s Software Store sells Office Home 2024 at a discounted price of £109.99**

Use a free version of Office

If you need office apps for occasional letter writing and basic spreadsheet work, consider cancelling your expensive 365 subscription and using Microsoft's free online versions of Word, Excel, PowerPoint and more. Sign in at www.snipca.com/53959 and select the app you want from the top-left menu button (see screenshot above). These are fine for simple everyday tasks, though they don't have all the features you'll find in their desktop equivalents, and you need to be connected to the internet to use them.

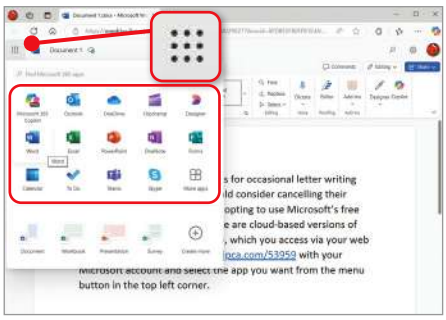
Use a free office suite instead

If cutting ties with Microsoft is as important to you as cutting costs, there are plenty of alternative office tools to choose from, most of which are free. Our favourite, LibreOffice (www.libreoffice.org), was recently updated to version 25.2 – we'll explain the best features in this update in our Make Office Better section over the next few months (page 47).

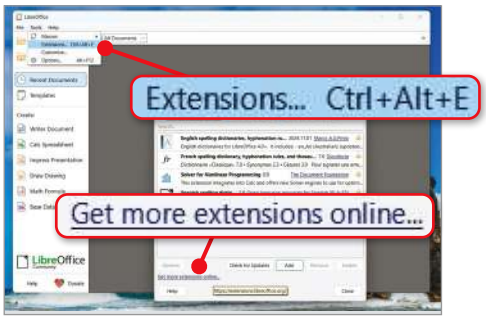
What about OneDrive?

Microsoft says if you cancel your 365 subscription, your OneDrive storage capacity will revert to the free 5GB allowance. If you've already used more than this, you won't be able to upload, edit or sync any new files. You also won't be able to send or receive emails through Outlook.com. And if you're still exceeding your 5GB allowance after six months, Microsoft reserves the right to delete all the files in your OneDrive storage.

If you no longer want the Office tools but still need a larger OneDrive allowance, consider downgrading to 365 Basic, which provides 100GB of cloud storage for £1.99 per month. Another option might be to use free storage from other providers – either instead of or in addition to your free 5GB OneDrive plan. Apple's iCloud (www.icloud.com) also gives you only 5GB for free, while Google Drive (https://drive.google.com) offers a generous 15GB.



Click the menu button in the online version of Office to see which tools you can use



Add extensions to LibreOffice to bring more tools to the excellent free office suite

Admittedly, LibreOffice looks a little dated compared with Microsoft's software, but its tools feel reassuringly familiar and come with all the features and templates you'll ever need. You don't have to worry about losing access to your existing Word, Excel and PowerPoint documents either, because it's compatible with DOCX, XLSX and PPTX files.

You can add more third-party features by clicking the Tools menu, selecting Extensions (1 in screenshot above) then clicking 'Get more extensions online' 2. Now browse or search for a tool. For example, search for localwriter, which adds free versions of the kind of AI tools you'd have to pay for in Microsoft Office.

We also really like OnlyOffice (www.snipca.com/45243), which offers free, installable versions of its Desktop Editor apps for working on documents, spreadsheets and presentations. OnlyOffice supports Microsoft file formats and lets you add features (including AI) through plug-ins.

There's also Google Docs, which you can use for free at https://docs.google.com. Docs, Sheets (spreadsheets) and Slides (presentations) have loads of features, but they're online only. They also work with Google's AI chatbot Gemini, but access to this costs £18 per month (see page 35). ca

Boost your TV's audio with a soundbar

If you're struggling to hear dialogue in TV shows and films, a soundbar can help. **Robert Irvine** explains how they work and recommends the best models

Why do I need a soundbar?

The ultra-slim designs of modern TVs leave little room for powerful built-in speakers, and manufacturers often limit audio quality to keep costs down. Your TV's screen may be Full HD or 4K, but with lacklustre sound you won't hear films and TV shows as they were intended.

A soundbar will significantly improve the audio output of your TV, delivering clearer, richer and room-filling sound without you having to turn up the volume. This is particularly useful when viewing programmes with muffled dialogue, because you won't jump out of your skin when a quiet scene cuts to a loud one or an advert break.

Many soundbars include surround-sound features to provide an immersive audio experience, so that – for example – on-screen helicopters sound as if they're flying over your head. Even the cheapest devices strike a better balance between speech, music and background noise than the speakers in your TV. Some also come with subwoofers, which boost bass and low-frequency sounds.

Do soundbars only work with TVs?

No. Most soundbars now have Bluetooth connectivity, and many also have Wi-FI, allowing you to stream music, podcasts and audiobooks from your phone or tablet. Higher-end models may have Alexa or Google Assistant built in, so you can use them instead of a smart speaker and control playback using your voice.

The Creative Sound Blaster GS3 is a soundbar designed for PCs

You may also be able to connect your soundbar to your PC using an AUX, USB or HDMI cable, or via Bluetooth or Wi-Fi. This will give you far superior sound to the tinny speakers in your monitor or laptop. The Creative Sound Blaster GS3 (£50 from www.snipca.com/52533, pictured above), which we reviewed in Issue 696 (page 28) is specifically designed for PCs.

How do I set up a soundbar?

Setting up a soundbar is very straightforward. Find the HDMI port on your TV labelled ARC (audio return channel) or eARC (enhanced audio return channel). Use an HDMI cable to connect it to the TV Out or HDMI Out port on the soundbar, then place the device under or near your TV.

If your TV doesn't have an HDMI ARC or eARC port, but only one labelled DVI, or no HDMI ports at all, connect the soundbar to its Optical port using a digital optical audio cable. You can buy an Amazon Basics optical cable for £3.29 (www.snipca.com/53962), but note that this method only supports digital surround sound up to 5.1 – not Dolby Atmos or DTS:X.

You can also connect the soundbar to the left and right Audio ports on your TV using an RCA or 3.5mm cable. However, because these cables only support analogue audio, you won't enjoy the benefits of digital sound.

If you don't hear any sound, tweak your TV's audio settings to switch from its built-in speakers to the soundbar. On an LG TV, for example, go to Settings then Sound, select Sound Out and choose 'HDMI (ARC) Device' (see screenshot below) or Optical Out Device.

You may need to tweak your TV's sound settings to hear audio through your soundbar

How do I control a soundbar?

Soundbars have physical power and volume buttons, and usually come with their own remote controls. They may also have mobile apps with virtual remotes. If you connect your soundbar to your TV using HDMI ARC or eARC, you should be able to adjust its volume and turn it on and off using your main TV remote.

To do so via HDMI ARC, you first need to switch on your TV's CEC (Consumer Electronics Control) feature. On Sony TVs this is called Bravia Link or Sync, on LG TVs it's SimpLink and on Samsung TVs it's Anynet+. Check the manufacturer's support site for CEC information.

With HDMI eARC, your TV will automatically detect the soundbar (provided it also supports eARC), so you can use your TV's remote to control it without tweaking any settings.

Which soundbar should you buy?

BEST FOR CLEARER DIALOGUE

ZVOX AccuVoice AV157

£153 from www.snipca.com/53967

This soundbar has been on the market since 2021, but you can still buy it from Amazon and it remains our top choice for making dialogue easy to hear. Although it uses an optical or 3.5mm analogue cable rather than HDMI, and lacks Bluetooth, the AV157 is expressly designed for people who have trouble deciphering speech in TV and films.

It uses ZVOX's AccuVoice technology to separate voices from the rest of the audio soundtrack, making them clear and understandable, and SuperVoice to reduce the sound level of non-spoken background sounds. These features make the soundbar more like a hearing aid you attach to your TV than a device for amplifying all audio. It's 43cm (17in) wide and can be mounted under a screen or on a wall (mount sold separately).

The ZVOX AccuVoice AV157 is designed to make dialogue clearer

The Superb Sony HT-S2000 now costs £290, down from £449

BEST BUDGET SOUNDBAR

Saiyin DS6305

£40 from www.snipca.com/51578

Saiyin isn't a well-known brand and its DS6305 soundbar doesn't have an HDMI port, Dolby Atmos or other cutting-edge audio features.

The Saiyin DS6305 is the best budget soundbar you can buy

But for the bargain price of £40, it's the ideal device if you're on a tight budget and simply want to boost the sound of a low-cost TV.

When we tested the Saiyin DS6305 in Issue 691 (page 29), we were pleasantly surprised by its overall audio quality, particularly its bass, which makes action scenes more immersive and provides depth to music. You can switch between three sound modes – Movie EQ, News and Music – and control the 43cm-wide device with its supplied remote. Since our review, a new model with a subwoofer has gone on sale for an extra £20 (www.snipca.com/53970).

BEST SOUNDBAR FOR QUALITY

Sony HT-S2000

£290 from www.snipca.com/53971

The Sony HT-S2000 may seem expensive compared with our other recommendations, but it costs considerably less than most soundbars that have similar specifications and has been reduced from its launch price of £449.

Although it lacks Wi-Fi and voice control, the HT-S2000 offers superb sound quality and a host of useful features.

It connects to your TV using HDMI eARC or a digital optical cable and supports the Dolby Atmos and DTS:X immersive audio formats. It also includes Bluetooth for wireless streaming from your phone or tablet, and has a USB-A port for playing music from external drives.

The HT-S2000 uses five speakers. Including two woofers for bass. These enable it to deliver superb quality sound that fills an entire room. It's particularly adept at handling dialogue in films and TV shows, with a dedicated Voice mode as well as Night (clear sound at low volume) and Sound Field (surround-sound) modes.

The soundbar is 80cm wide, and you can control it using the Sony mobile app, its supplied remote or – when using HDMI ARC or eARC – your TV's remote.

If it's too expensive, consider the **Ultimea Nova S50** we reviewed in Issue 690 (page 29). This isn't as good at enhancing dialogue or filling a room with sound, but it costs only £110 (www.snipca.com/51457) and has Dolby Atmos and an external subwoofer.

Alternatively, you can buy the Sony HT-SF150 soundbar (reviewed on page 29) for the bargain price of £99, though this doesn't have surround sound. ca

Do you really need Dolby Atmos?

The price of soundbars with Dolby Atmos has come down considerably in recent years, but they still cost more than those without the surround-sound technology. However, if you watch lots of films and high-budget shows on streaming services, Dolby Atmos may be worth the extra investment.

Not only does a Dolby Atmos soundbar deliver an immersive audio experience that your TV alone can't provide (even if it supports the feature), but it also makes quiet and muffled dialogue easier to hear. Because Dolby Atmos spreads sound in all directions and uses separate speakers and channels for speech, music and effects, it's easier for your ears to pick out the words.

Rival surround-sound system DTS has developed a Clear Dialogue feature that uses AI to clarify voices (see www.snipca.com/53973). TVs and soundbars with this option will begin to appear soon.

Problems Solved

Our experts solve all your tech problems

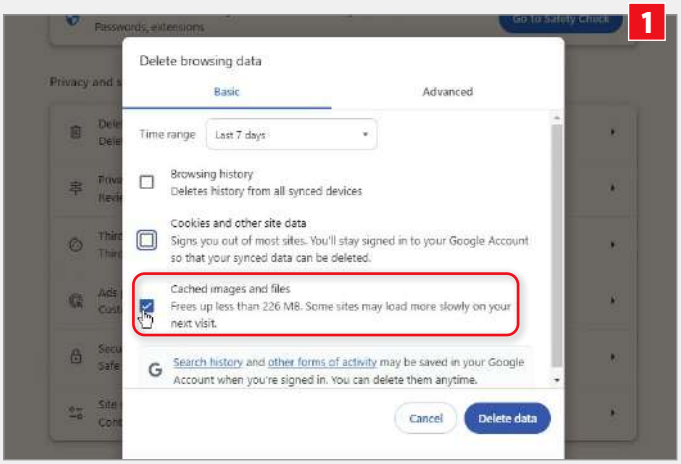
PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

Why can't I print email attachments?

Q As a long-time *Computeractive* reader, I'm used to hearing about other people's problems. However, I'm now experiencing a problem of my own and would very much like your advice.

I recently started having trouble printing email attachments. When I click the Print button, the box pops up as usual, but then I receive a message saying 'loading preview'. This just sits there for a few minutes, followed by a message telling me the print was unsuccessful. Any thoughts about a possible solution?

Mike Smith


Delete browsing data
Basic
Advanced
Time range
Last 7 days
Browsing history
Deletes history from all synced devices
Cookies and other site data
Signs you out of most sites. You'll stay signed in to your Google Account so that your synced data can be deleted.
Cached images and files
Frees up less than 226 MB. Some sites may load more slowly on your next visit.
Search history and other forms of activity may be saved in your Google Account when you're signed in. You can delete them anytime.
Cancel
Delete data

1 **Delete your browsing data if you're having trouble printing from Gmail**

A This is certainly odd and we can't be sure of the cause. First, have you tried downloading the attachment to your Windows desktop rather than printing directly from the email? That way, you can open the file in the relevant program and try printing from there.

You didn't tell us which email program or service you use but your message arrived from a gmail.com address, so we assume you're using Gmail. That being the case, clearing your browser's cache and cookies might help resolve the issue.

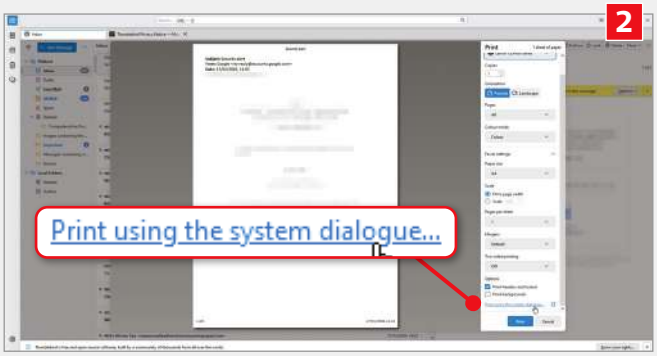
In Chrome, for example, open the menu (three dots, top right), then click 'Delete browsing data'. What and how much data you delete is up to you. If you'd rather not delete everything at once, proceed by trial and error, deleting the last few weeks of cookies, for example. You won't lose much by deleting the cache, though, so keep the 'Cached images and files' box ticked (see screenshot 1).

If you're using a third-party email client such as Thunderbird, look for the option to use the Windows Print box rather than the software's own. In Thunderbird, you'll find this option by scrolling to the bottom of its own Print box 2. If you're able to print when using the Windows Print box, consider reinstalling your email tool.

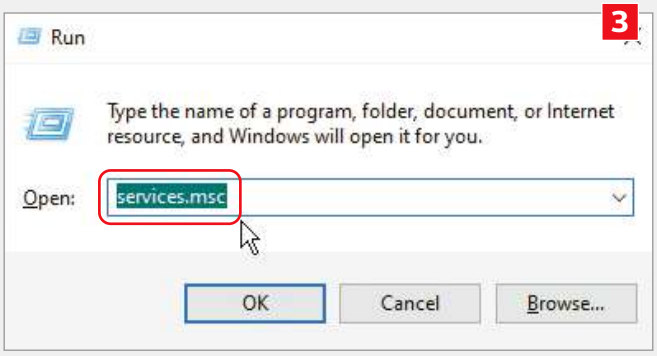
As a final option, when the problem next arises, try restarting the Windows Print Spooler service, because this sometimes fixes printing problems.

To do this, first press Windows+R to open the Run box, then type services.msc 3 and press Enter. Next, in the Services pane, under the Name column, scroll through the list to find the Print Spooler entry. Right-click this and choose Restart from the menu that appears. Wait a few moments and then, once Print Spooler is Running again (which you can see in the Status column), try printing the attachment to see if it works.

Hopefully, one of these suggestions will solve your problem, but as this is a curious one, we'll throw it open to your fellow readers. So, if anyone has any more suggestions as to what might be causing Mike's problem, let us know.



2 **Set Thunderbird to use Windows' print box by clicking this option at the bottom of Thunderbird's own print box**



3 **To access the Windows Print Spooler, press Windows+R to open the Run box, then type services.msc and press Enter**

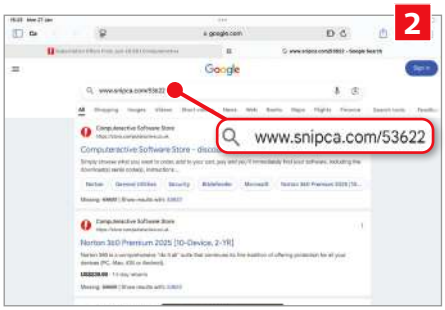
Why can't I make your snipca URLs work on my iPad?

Q I've been enjoying your magazine for a very long time. However, I always feel frustrated whenever I notice the box on your Welcome page that explains how to use snipca URLs, because they never work for me. I use an iPad Air and no one I know has been able to help. If I open Safari, Google search comes up. If I then tap and delete Google.com in the top address bar and type a snipca.com URL, Yahoo search appears, listing sites that don't work.

I'm sure the problem can't be specific to iPads because, if so, you would have dealt with it long ago. Perhaps I just need to reset something.

William Allen

Type the full snipca URL into your browser's address bar and press Enter to visit the site



Typing the snipca URL into a search engine will return irrelevant search results

A Ironically, the cause of the confusion here is probably elements of the iPad's software that are supposed to make things easier.

As the box on our Welcome page states, search engines don't recognise snipca links. You need to type the full snipca.com URL into the address bar at the top (see screenshot 1), then press Enter.

However, there are a couple of things that could be tripping you up. First, on the iPad's on-screen keyboard, the Enter key is not labelled 'Enter'. Depending on which version of iPadOS you're running, it's either marked with a right-angled arrow or the word 'Go'. This is the button you must tap after typing the full snipca.com URL. It's typically coloured blue. So, for example, you would type www.snipca.com/53622 followed by the blue Enter or Go button.

Something else that catches out a lot of iPad users is that, before you press Enter, the tablet comes up with suggestions for what it thinks you might want, based on its own history and search engine, as well as from other search engines you've used. It's tempting to tap one of those 'suggestions', but doing this won't take you to where you want to go, because the related search engine simply searches for the URL rather than actually taking you to the linked website 2. Because every new issue we publish contains lots of unique snipca URLs, search engines rarely if ever find them.

Disabling these features can help eliminate this confusion. To do this, open the iPad's Settings app then, on the left, tap Apps. Next, on the right, tap Safari. Finally, under the Search heading, switch off both Suggestion sliders.

Can I use my old all-in-one PC's screen with a new mini PC?

Q I have a Dell OptiPlex 5250 all-in-one PC that won't run Windows 11. If I were to buy a mini PC, say, would I be able to use the 5250's screen as a monitor for the new computer? Also, could I run my programs from my Dell machine to avoid reloading everything on to a new PC?

Peter Brown

A Dell's documentation isn't clear about whether all versions of this machine have an HDMI input. It seems some do, while others don't. So the easiest way to find out is to look at the back on your PC to see if it has both an HDMI input and output – that's two distinct ports. If it does, you can connect a new PC to the all-in-one's HDMI input to use it as an external display. Use the control buttons on the right-hand side of your all-in-one (pictured) to access the on-screen display (OSD) menu to switch the screen's source to the HDMI input.

As for running programs from your old PC on the new one, you could in theory do this using Remote Desktop, but only if your Dell has a Pro edition of Windows 10. However, this tool is really designed for technical support rather than day-to-day running of programs, so it's not a practical solution. It'd be far quicker and more convenient to reinstall the apps you want on your new PC.

Use these buttons to switch your screen's source to HDMI

How can I lock up my laptop?

Q I bought a Dell Inspiron 14 Plus laptop after reading your recommendation (Issue 699, page 23). I'm generally very pleased with it but I've realised it doesn't have a Kensington lock slot. Do you know of any alternative ways I can secure my laptop, because I generally leave it on my desk for everyday use or in my campervan while on holiday.

Martin Chadwick

A Kensington slots are the de facto industry standard for securing your laptop by locking it to a desk, for example. You typically find them on laptops aimed at business users rather than those pitched at consumers, such as the Inspiron.

Alternatives are limited because there aren't many ways to lock down a laptop that doesn't have a dedicated security slot. Perhaps the next best thing is The Blade, from Maclocks (www.snipca.com/53647, pictured below).

Though designed to blend in with Apple MacBooks, its adhesive plate will stick to the underside of pretty much any modern laptop, elevating the rear a little. A retractable 'blade' folds out from the back, with a security slot to which you can attach a cable. Maclocks sells the kit complete with a lock and key for £55.

Maclocks' Blade lets owners of slotless laptops lock up their device

An adhesive plate sticks to the base, tilting the laptop forward a little

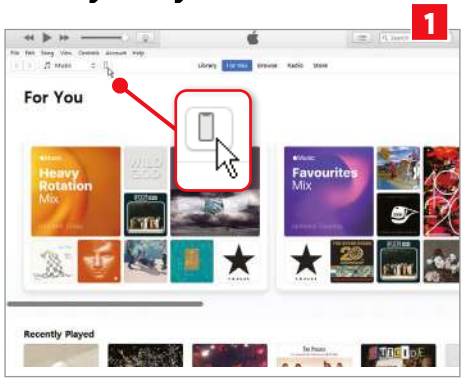
Is my laptop protected by my mobile VPN?

Q I ditched my broadband for a purely mobile-data contract some time ago. The only problem I've encountered is that I can't back up my iPhone over mobile data. I get round this by walking to my local library once a fortnight to use its free Wi-Fi. One thing puzzles me, however. I have a VPN set up on my iPhone and I tether my laptop through it. Does the VPN also protect the traffic from my laptop?

Dick Dewhurst

A Very simply, yes. When your iPhone connects to the internet through a VPN, any device that accesses the web by tethering to your phone will also benefit from the protections and features of whichever VPN service you're using. Typically this includes hiding your connection's real IP address, encrypting any data you send and receive, circumventing location-based restrictions when using streaming services and so on.

Also, while you didn't suggest it was a problem, we'd point out that you could always back up your iPhone directly to your computer using Apple's iTunes app (a free download from www.snipca.com/53648). First, plug your iPhone into your computer using a Lightning or USB-C cable, depending on the model. Next, click the iPhone icon in iTunes (see screenshot 1) then, under Backups, choose the option This Computer 2 before clicking the Back Up Now button.



Connect your iPhone to your PC, then click the iPhone symbol in Apple's iTunes software

Select 'This Computer' in iTunes to back up your iPhone to your PC

Q: How do I stop phone scammers using my number?

A: Issue 686, page 65 – find it on our 2024 Back Issue CD

Buy it from www.snipca.com/53433

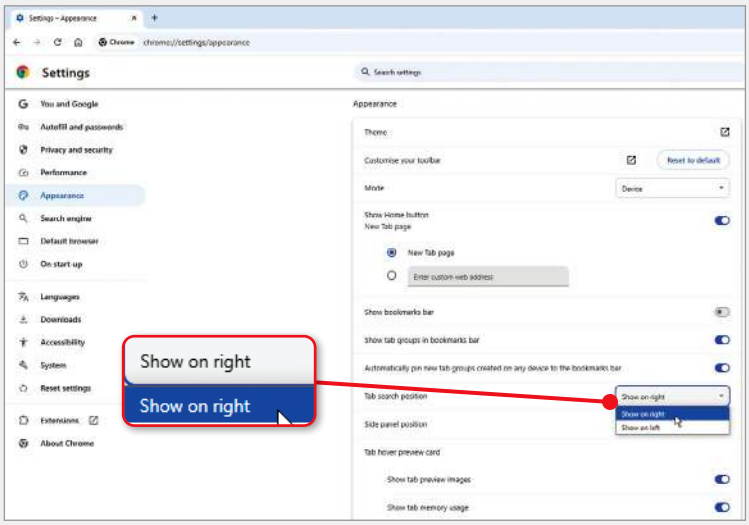
How do I remove this annoying Chrome button?

Q I recently replaced my ancient Windows 10 desktop PC with a shiny new Windows 11 laptop. On my new machine, there's a down-pointing arrow just to the left of the tab bar in Chrome. Clicking it opens a sidebar for searching tabs.

That's all very well, but I don't need this feature, and the position of this arrow is really annoying. I like to pin my Gmail tab so I can click it quickly, but with this stupid arrow fixed in the top left, I'm forever clicking that instead. I remembered that I'd previously followed a tip to disable it on my old PC, but while Googling for a reminder of what to do, I found people saying the tweaks no longer work.

Is this true? If so, how do I disable this frustrating thing?

Maurice Winfield



To move the button, select this option in the Appearance section of Chrome's Settings

A This button opens Chrome's tab search feature. It's not new, but around a year ago Google in its infinite wisdom decided it should be stuck in the top left of the browser rather than on the right where it was originally located. Disgruntled users came up with various hacks to Chrome's flags to disable it, but Google has systematically updated its browser to stop each new one working.

Thankfully, Google has since relented, adding an option to move this button, so at least you can banish it from the top-left corner. First, open the Chrome menu (three dots, top right) then choose Settings. Next, on the left, click Appearance. Finally, in the right-hand pane, next to the 'Tab search position' heading, open the dropdown menu and choose 'Show on right' (see screenshot). When you next restart Chrome, the button will appear on the right.

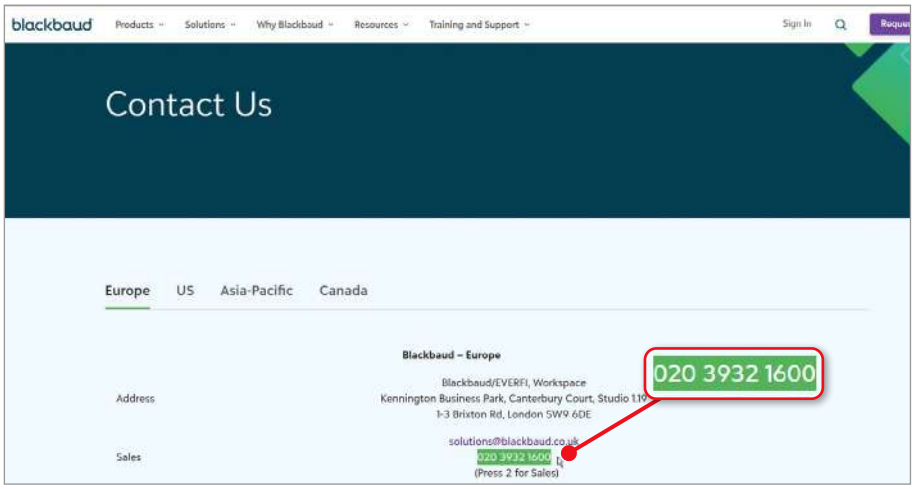
Why has my email address been blacklisted?

Q I volunteer for the National Trust (NT) and recently became aware that I was no longer receiving important emails from the organisation. NT tells me my email provider, Mail.com, has been blacklisted by NT's own provider, Blackbaud, after a rise in the number of abusive accounts.

I've been using this address without incident since 2003. NT sympathised but said it couldn't help and says it has no influence over Blackbaud. Mail.com told me it needed to see the bounce-back message NT received from Blackbaud.

Any ideas other than changing my email provider, which I don't want to do?

Cliff Brambleton



Cliff can phone Blackbaud to ask it to add his blocked Mail.com address to a whitelist

A We've changed your name to avoid revealing your Mail.com email address. Mail.com is right that without seeing the specific bounce-back message there's little it can do. You didn't indicate whether you'd asked NT to forward you this bounce-back, so we'd start by doing that. Mail.com's technical people would then be able to discuss the problem with their counterparts at Blackbaud.

You say NT suggested it has no sway over Blackbaud, but we'd remind NT that it is (presumably) a paying customer of Blackbaud, so a complaint from NT's digital team absolutely should have some influence.

As a last resort you could ask Blackbaud about the problem yourself, and suggest it adds your email address to a whitelist. It might not do what you ask but you've little to lose by giving its technical support team a call on 020 3932 1600 (see screenshot).

What's this odd symbol on my Copilot key?

Microsoft requires manufacturers to include a Copilot key on new laptops

Q My Windows 11 laptop has the new Copilot key on its keyboard (pictured right). However, I've noticed that there's also a little square box below the Copilot logo on the same key (pictured below right). Is it related to Copilot? If not, what does it do and how do I use it?

Tony Snowdown

A That little symbol actually predates the introduction of the Copilot key. It represents the menu or application key, and would have been the key's sole function before Microsoft started telling manufacturers to add Copilot buttons to their laptops. Pressing the menu key opens the right-click (or context) menu for whatever item you currently have selected, whether it's an icon on the Windows desktop or a passage of text you've highlighted in a word-processing program, for example.

Some manufacturers have gone a step further and ditched the menu key in favour of a dedicated Copilot key. Others have hedged their bets by giving the Copilot key a dual function, demoting the original right-click function to a secondary command. To use a key's secondary function, you typically hold down the Function (Fn) key or Control (Ctrl) while pressing it.

So, if you want to use Copilot, simply tap the key. But if you need to open the context menu using the keyboard rather than right-clicking with your mouse, just hold down Fn or Ctrl while pressing the key.

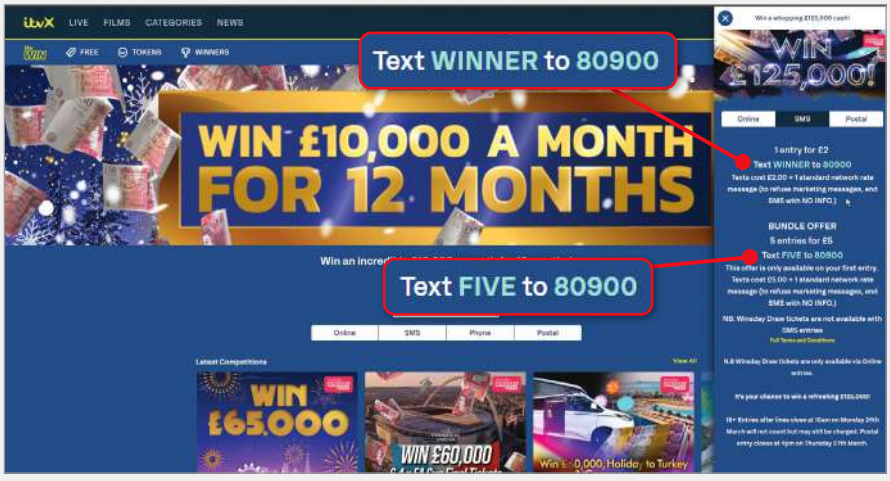
The small square in the corner of the Copilot key is the symbol for the menu key

Why can't I enter competitions via text messages?

Q When the price of my EE mobile plan increased, I decided to take out a cheaper contract with Lyca Mobile. It's been fine, but I've discovered that I can't send SMS text messages to five-digit numbers, such as those for entering competitions on some ITV programmes (pictured).

When I try, my phone tells me my SMS message failed to send. Lyca hasn't come up with a solution. Can you help?

Terry Read



Virtual phone companies such as Lyca rarely support SMS messages to premium numbers

A The simple fact is that Lyca Mobile doesn't support SMS text messages to short-code services. This is a common drawback of mobile virtual network operators (MNVO), such as Lyca.

Instead of running their own mast networks, these companies rent airtime from the bigger firms such as EE, O2 and Vodafone. As such, they typically lack the complex reverse-billing mechanisms they would need to support premium short-code services.

You may find you can use a handful of free short-code services, such as the ability to request a port-authorisation code (PAC) by texting PAC to 65075, but these are usually requirements of the operator licence. If you want to use premium short-code services for other purposes, such as entering competitions, your only option is to move to a network that supports them.

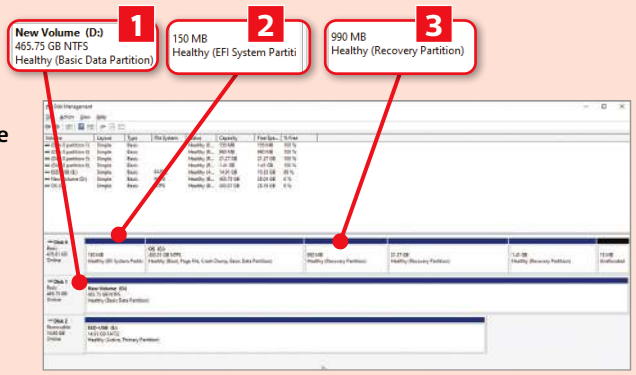
WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

Hard-drive partitions?

Q My Windows 10 PC is a few years old. When I bought it, I equipped it with two hard drives – labelled C and D. When I looked at these in Disk Management recently, I saw they were divided into various types of partition. C, for example, has three partitions, labelled 'Healthy (EFI System Partition', 'Healthy (Recovery Partition)' and 'Healthy (Basic Data Partition)', while D has both 'Healthy (Basic Data Partition)' and a partition called 'Unallocated'. This latter partition is very small, but I'm wondering if I can use it. And what's the difference between the others?

Lionel Goddard

A Windows 10's New Technology File System, or NTFS, relies on a variety of partition types. Explaining them all in detail would be difficult here, but for most people, most of the time, the only partitions of interest are Primary and Unallocated.



Primary partitions contain your operating system, core software and user data

Primary partitions, such as those that Disk Management labels 'Healthy (Basic Data Partition)', are typically where the operating system, applications and user data are stored. On your system, the operating system and core software are almost certainly on the Primary partition labelled 'Healthy (Basic Data Partition)' (1 in our screenshot). It may also contain some personal files and folders, but we suspect most of those are on the partition of the same name on your D drive.

The one labelled 'Healthy (EFI System Partition' 2 was created by the operating system or manufacturer during the initial installation, and its purpose is to get the PC up and running before Windows kicks in. Any partition labelled Recovery 3 was probably created by the manufacturer, and contains data that lets you restore your PC to its factory settings or at least get it working again after major system problems.

An 'Unallocated' partition is in effect a Primary partition in waiting, so yes, you can use it. To make it available, first right-click the 'Unallocated' rectangle in Disk Management and choose New Simple Volume. Now work through the instructions to configure the drive's size before assigning it a drive letter.

Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Can Google force me to log in to use YouTube?

Q Until recently, anyone visiting YouTube through a VPN may have had to complete a Captcha challenge to prove they're not a bot. That's fair enough, but now Google is telling me to sign in whenever I visit the site, and giving me no alternative.

I wonder if this is lawful. Google may own the YouTube platform, but millions of individuals have contributed and own their content. Can the company really block access to all the third-party content on its site unless visitors hand over their private information? Even Facebook and Instagram let visitors view content unless the contributor restricts access to it.

Vee Kumar

A The short answer is that Google owns YouTube, so Google can set whatever rules it likes, including a requirement for people to sign in when it deems it necessary.

Obviously the company has to operate within the law but, in the UK at least, there's nothing to stop it demanding that you sign in. When creators upload their content to YouTube, they give Google licence to control how people access it.

If your VPN is causing problems with YouTube, switch to a different server

Having said that, Google doesn't have a blanket policy requiring YouTube visitors to sign in. For some reason, its complex algorithms have determined that you must do so. This could be because you use a VPN, but there may be any number of other reasons, such as failing one too many Captcha puzzles.

We don't know which VPN tool you use, but changing the active server might help because Google may have blacklisted the current one for some reason.

To do this in Windscribe, for example, click the down-pointing arrow next to Locations, then click to choose a different server (see screenshot left). Alternatively, use a tool such as FreeTube to watch YouTube videos privately. This has been a favourite among our readers for a few years, and it's a free download from https://freetubeapp.io.

Next Issue

ON SALE Weds 26 Mar

- Why can't I add a Chrome search engine?
- How do I connect HDMI to my display?
- How do I turn on a mounted mini PC? ...And many more

Subscribe to Computeractive at www.getcomputeractive.co.uk

Computer active

READER OFFER!

LOWEST-EVER PRICE!

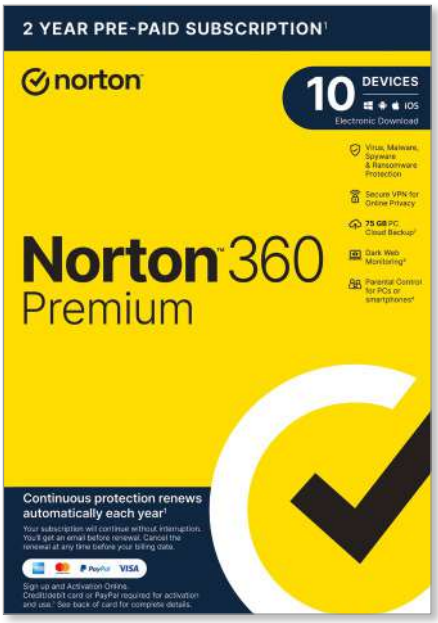
Norton 360 Premium
10 devices, 2 years

We're delighted to announce our lowest-ever price for Norton 360 Premium. For just £19.99, you'll protect 10 devices for two years. Available both for new customers and existing Norton users wanting to renew.

WHAT YOU GET

- ✓ Real-time malware protection
- ✓ Secure VPN
- ✓ 75GB PC Cloud Backup

PLUS Monitors the dark web for your personal information



Norton is made by NortonLifeLock Inc – a standalone company dedicated to consumer cyber safety. It has always performed strongly in *Computeractive* antivirus tests, so we highly recommend it.

10 devices for two years NOW ONLY £19.99*

Normally £179.99

Buy it from our Software Store at www.snipca.com/33247

*while stocks last

Reader Support

Having a problem with our recommended software or expert tips? Email **editor@computeractive.co.uk** and we'll do our best to help

Is there any point me buying a Wi-Fi 6 router?

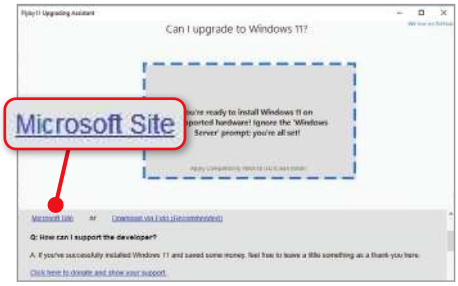
Q I read Issue 701's Cover Feature on binning your old router with great interest. I have Fibre-to-the-Cabinet (FTTC) broadband, with the last short section to my house on copper only. My provider is Plusnet, and I have the company's Hub Two router. Plusnet told me it would be pointless for me to use a Wi-Fi 6 router because my service can only use Wi-Fi 5. I would not get 802.11ax speeds even with the world's best Wi-Fi 6 router. Also, most routers provided by ISPs are actually routers and modems combined, so how exactly would this work with my kind of service?

Nick Corcos

A Your Plusnet advisor is partially correct. The top speed of the data stream from the internet to your devices will be limited by the download speed of the broadband coming into the house.

However, most people notice significant benefits from the speed, range and reliability boosts offered by Wi-Fi 6, regardless of their broadband speed. This is especially true in households that use lots of devices at the same time, as Wi-Fi 6 handles multiple simultaneous connections better than older Wi-Fi standards. As we mentioned in our Cover Feature, Wi-Fi 6's improved beamforming can also help eliminate interference and dead zones.

As to the second part of your question – yes, ISP-provided routers usually come with a built-in DSL modem, which is required if you're connecting to Fibre-to-the-Cabinet broadband, but not for Fibre-to-the-Premises (FTTP). In your case, you could use your old ISP router as a standalone modem by disabling its Wi-Fi functionality, then connecting it to the WAN port on the new router to benefit from Wi-Fi 6's improvements. See our answer to Ian MacLachlan's problem in Issue 704 (page 71) for more on this.



Try clicking the Microsoft Site link in Flyby11 and downloading Windows 11 via a private browser tab

Why won't Flyby11 upgrade my laptop to Windows 11?

Q After reading Issue 703's excellent Cover Feature 'Break Windows' worst rules' I was keen to use Flyby11 (www.snipca.com/53833) to help my friend upgrade his Windows 10 laptop. I thought I had correctly followed the instructions on page 51, but when I got to the point of actually upgrading the computer I received an error message saying 'Some users, entities and locations are banned from using this service'. Has Microsoft closed this loophole, or have I made a mistake?

David Clowes

A As we reported in Issue 704 (page 6), Windows Defender started flagging Flyby11 as a PUA (Potentially Unwanted Application) before downgrading it to a 'HackTool', which are programs that can modify or bypass system restrictions, licensing protections or security settings. That might have caused your problems. The good news is that Flyby11's developer has released a new version (1.6 at the time of going to press) to get around any restrictions from Microsoft.

Some users have received your error message when attempting to download Windows 11 ISO files. One workaround is to click the Microsoft Site link we mentioned in our original instructions (see screenshot left), then copy and paste the URL into a private browser tab to see if this bypasses the error message. Also, if you use a VPN, try using Flyby with it both on and off to see if it makes a difference.

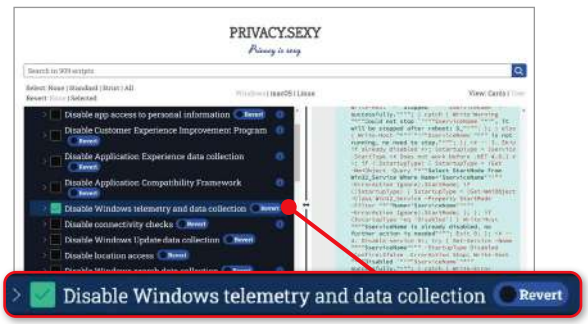
Why did Privacy.sexy not work?

Q I downloaded Privacy.sexy (www.snipca.com/53604) as you recommended in Issue 703's Cover Feature (page 57). I selected three of the boxes after clicking the Tree setting. This seemed to work until I realised I was unable to get on to the internet. Also, all my administrator rights were no longer there and the Microsoft Store was missing. After trying every setting, I had to revert to using a cloned drive and reinstalling Windows from there. What went wrong?

Chris Trussler

A Privacy.sexy is a powerful tool and should always be used with care. As we noted in our original Cover Feature, breaking Windows' rules can be a delicate business, and we always advise creating a system restore point before carrying out any significant tweaks. That said, all the changes we suggested are safe.

And Privacy.sexy itself offers a quick and easy way to undo any tweaks you've made – simply click the Revert button next to the option you changed (see screenshot below).



Click the Revert button in Privacy.sexy to roll back any Windows changes you don't like

Jargon Buster

1080p High-definition video: 1920x1080 pixels.

2K A screen with 2048x1080 pixels.

32bit/64bit A measure of how much data a PC can process at once. Most older computers are 32bit, more modern ones are 64bit.

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels.

5.1 A surround-sound system with five speakers and one separate subwoofer.

802.11ax Wi-Fi standard with speeds up to 10 times faster than 802.11ac. Also called Wi-Fi 6.

Administrator Someone who can make changes to a computer that will affect others who also use it.

AI Artificial intelligence. Intelligence demonstrated by a machine rather than a human being. Often used to describe technology that can perform human-like tasks.

AMOLED Active-Matrix Organic Light-Emitting Diode. An alternative technology to LCD for creating flat-panel screens.

API Application Programming Interface. A system built into a program so that other programs can work with it.

ARC Audio return channel. A feature on TVs that lets audio signals travel both to and from the TV via a single HDMI cable.

Augmented reality Lets you view the real world on a screen and add virtual elements.

AUX Auxiliary input. Cable that sends audio signals.

Bandwidth A measure of how much data can be transferred through a connection at one time.

Beamforming A technique for microphones to pick up on specific sources of sound and reduce background noise.

Beta A version of software that's being tested.

Blacklist A list of files, email addresses or websites known to be risky.

Bloatware Unwanted software built into a new device.

Bot Automated software designed to perform specific tasks.

Buffering Downloading a certain amount of data before starting to play a video. Can cause delays to your streaming.

Cache A temporary space for storing information.

CAPTCHA Distorted text you have to type to prove you're a human.

cd/m² Candela per square metre. Standard unit of brightness.

Chatbot A computer program designed to recreate conversation with human users, especially over the internet.

Chromebook Plus Google's advanced standard of Chromebooks, with better hardware, including faster processors, more RAM and AI-powered features.

Client A program that acts as an interface between PC and server.

Clone A feature found in backup programs that makes an exact copy of a drive on to another drive.

Command Prompt A text-based interface in Windows for writing commands that perform specific tasks.

Cookie A small text file stored on your computer by a website. Used to store browsing preferences, website log-in details and so on.

Crowdsourcing Obtaining ideas, information or money from a large group of people, usually online, rather than from more traditional sources.

Cryptocurrency A digital currency not backed by any country. The most popular is Bitcoin.

CSV Comma Separated Value. A standard file format, used for storing information in tables, that can be opened by most spreadsheet programs.

Dark mode Showing white text on a black background.

Depth of field The distance between the closest and farthest objects that appear acceptably sharp.

Digital optical Using light to transmit digital data, commonly through fibre-optic cables or optical discs.

DisplayPort A socket for connecting monitors.

DOCX The default file format used by Word 2007 and later.

Dolby Atmos Surround-sound technology that adds 'height' to the audio through speakers built into the top of devices.

DRM Digital Rights Management. Software that limits the copying of a file.

DTS: X A type of surround sound.

DVI Digital Visual Interface. A common type of display connector that can carry a digital signal.

eARC Enhanced Audio Return Channel. Lets you transmit the original full-resolution audio signal through an HDMI cable to reproduce the best sound.

EPUB A file format used by many popular ebook readers.

Ethernet A standard used for almost all wired computer networks.

Factory settings The original system state of an electronic device.

Field of view The amount of space measured in angles that can be seen from the camera lens.

Frame rate The number of still images, or frames, shown per second to create a moving image. Higher frame rates make games appear smoother and more realistic.

Freemium A business model, especially on the internet, where basic services are provided for free, while more advanced features must be paid for.

FTTC Fibre-to-the-cabinet. A broadband technology that uses fibre-optic cable between a phone exchange and street cabinets before transferring to normal phone wires.

FTTP Fibre-to-the premises. Fibre broadband that goes straight to the doorstep. Faster than FTTC (fibre-to-the-cabinet).

Full HD Resolution of 1920x1080 pixels.

Generative AI Creating content such as videos, images and text from instructions given by users.

Gorilla glass Scratch-resistant glass that's used to protect the screens of tablets and phones.

GPS Global positioning system. Satellite-based navigational system.

Graphics card A component in a computer that produces the image shown on the monitor.

Hardware encryption A method of encrypting data using specialised hardware.

HDMI High-definition media interface. A type of connection that transmits high-definition video and audio signals.

Hotspot A public area covered by a Wi-Fi network that allows you to access the internet, either free or for a fee.

HTTPS Hyper Text Transfer Protocol Secure. The secure version of HTTP, the technology that sends data between your browser and the web.

Hyperlink A clickable link that takes you to a new document or website.

Hz Hertz. Measures the frequency something happens: 1Hz equals once a second.

Incognito mode A browser mode that doesn't save your internet history.

IP55 Ingress Protection 55. Indicates that a phone has been tested against dust and water for up to 55 minutes at a pressure of one atmosphere (or about 10 centimetres of air).

IP address Internet Protocol address. A unique set of numbers used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

IPS A screen technology. Monitors that use it have wider viewing angles and better, more accurate colours than monitors that do not use this technology.

ISO file A type of image file that contains data from a CD or DVD.

JPEG Joint Photograph Experts Group. A common type of image file created by most digital cameras. Some image quality is lost with each save.

Kensington lock Security system for laptops, monitors and other devices. Lets users attach a cable lock, preventing theft by securing the device to a fixed object.

KVM switch Keyboard, video and mouse. A device that lets you control multiple computers from one or more sets of keyboards, monitors and mice.

LCD Liquid-crystal display. The technology used to create almost all flatscreen monitors.

LED Light-emitting diode. An electronic device that emits light. Used on almost all electronic devices, and to provide the backlight for some LCDs.

Lightning connector Apple's own connector that connects iPhones and iPads to computers, cameras, chargers and more.

LLM Large language model. A type of artificial intelligence algorithm that analyses huge amounts of data sets to summarise and create content.

M.2 A standard specification for PC expansion cards and connectors.

MagSafe A magnetic technology from Apple that allows for wireless charging and attaching accessories.

Metadata A set of data that gives information about a file.

MicroSD card A small type of memory card. Can be converted to SD size using an adapter.

MVNO Mobile virtual network operator. A mobile provider that piggybacks on another network rather than its own.

NTFS New Technology File System. A file system used by all recent versions of Windows.

NVMe Non-Volatile Memory Express. An interface that lets solid-state drives work faster.

Open source Software that can be modified by anyone, rather than just by the employees of the company that created it.

Optical port A socket that provides a high-quality sound signal between computers, amplifiers, CD and DVD players and more.

PAC Porting Authorisation Code. A unique code that lets users retain their mobile telephone number when switching operators.

Partition A large hard drive can be split into two or more partitions or 'virtual' drives.

Plain text Text in a document that doesn't contain any formatting, such as bold characters and italics.

Plug-in A small program that adds extra features to software or to your web browser.

PNG Portable Network Graphics. A format for images that shrinks file sizes using compression but without discarding any data.

Power-up A temporary or permanent item that enhances a gaming player's abilities, such as increased speed, strength, health or special attacks.

PPTX The default file format for Microsoft PowerPoint since version 2007.

QLED Quantum Light-Emitting Diode. Screen technology that uses nanoparticles called quantum dots to boost brightness and colour.

Quantum Dot HDR A screen technology that uses quantum dots to enhance brightness, colour accuracy, and contrast for high dynamic range (HDR) content.

RAM Random-access memory. The computer's working area, used for data storage while the PC is switched on.

RAR Roshal Archive. A format for storing compressed files.

RCA plug Part of an RCA connector used to carry audio and video signals.

RCS Rich Communication Services. A method of sending text messages over phones with more features than SMS, such as photos and videos.

Read To access data saved on a computer.

Recovery key A password to access a locked account.

Refresh rate Measured in Hertz (Hz), the number of times per second that the image on your monitor is redrawn.

Remote desktop Windows tool that lets users connect to and control a Windows PC from another device over the internet or a network, as if they were sitting in front of it.

Roaming charge Fee incurred for using your phone to receive data through overseas mobile networks.

SD card Secure Digital card. A popular type of memory card.

Shortcode Abbreviated code that represents a specific command. Used in programming to simplify or streamline tasks.

SMS Short Message Service. More commonly called text messaging.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that, unlike a hard drive, uses no moving parts. Faster but more expensive than conventional hard drives.

Subwoofer A special type of speaker designed to reproduce deep bass sounds only. Even on a stereo system, only one subwoofer is required because human ears cannot detect the direction of bass frequencies.

System restore point The collection of system files stored by System Restore on a given date and time to which Windows can revert if a problem occurs.

Tag A keyword used to describe a file or web page. Many programs use tags to organise related information quickly.

USB 2.0/3.0/3.1/3.2/4.0 Faster successors to USB.

USB-A The original type of USB connector, released in 1996.

USB-C A newer connector that's reversible.

Vector graphics Graphics that are rendered as smooth lines, so they can be enlarged to any scale without a loss of quality, unlike bitmapped images which will become jagged when blown up.

VPN Virtual private network. Keeps all internet communication safe and private.

WAN Wide Area Network. Exists over a large geographical area.

Web apps Programs that aren't stored on your computer, but on a web server instead and run through your web browser.

Whitelist A list of allowed websites, email addresses and applications used by security software to ensure you only visit safe websites and download safe programs.

Widget A small program such as a calendar that runs on the Windows desktop.

Woofer A speaker designed to produce low-frequency bass sounds. Named after the noise made by dogs.

Write Save data to a hard drive.

XLSX The default file format for Microsoft Excel since version 2007.

ZIP file A file that contains compressed documents or files.

Wi-Fi 6 Wi-Fi standard with speeds up to 10 times faster than 802.11ac. Also called 802.11ax.

Easy when you

Know How

Fed up with preinstalled apps hogging valuable storage space, **Robert Irvine** tries to...

Uninstall junk from his Fire stick

Along with 'toilets out of order' and 'rail-replacement bus service', one of the most frustrating messages you can encounter in life is 'insufficient storage'. Now that PCs and phones have hundreds of gigabytes of space, it's less common than it used to be, but you're still quite likely to see it on a TV-streaming stick.

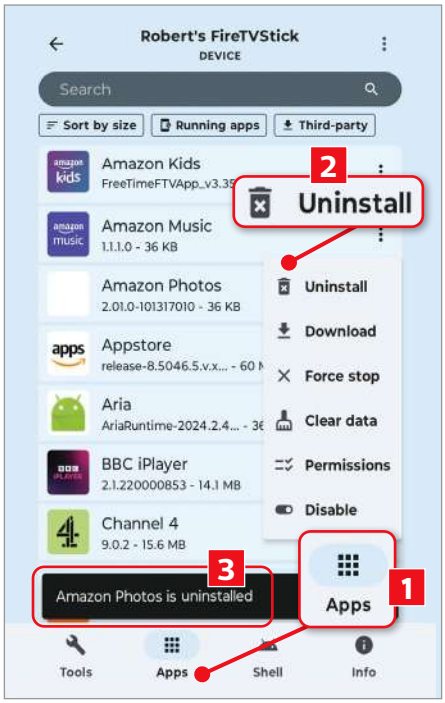
As we explained in Issue 704's 'Ditch your old TV habits' Cover Feature (page 57), streaming devices such as Amazon's Fire TV Sticks and the 'Chromecast with Google TV' include very little built-in storage. Though their specifications boast of 8GB capacities, most of this is taken up by the TV operating system, leaving you with only a few 'gigs' to install more apps.

I experienced this annoyance (again) the other day, when I tried to install Apple TV+ on my Fire Stick. This prompted the scary message 'critically low on storage space' and advised me to uninstall other apps to make room. However, I'd already removed most apps I no longer wanted the last time I saw the message.

The main exceptions were tools that Amazon installed on the stick, such as Amazon Kids, Amazon Photos, Silk Browser and Freevee. The latter is the only one I've ever used, but since Freevee has been discontinued and integrated with Prime Video its presence is rather pointless.

Irritatingly, none of these apps can be uninstalled, and though I cleared their caches and data, the storage savings were negligible. So instead I turned to a mobile app called atvTools, which provides

Enable 'debugging' to wirelessly connect atvTools to your streaming device



Robert used atvTools to remove Amazon's preinstalled apps from his Fire TV Stick

several ways to control Android TV devices, including the deletion of unwanted apps. Because Amazon's Fire operating system is based on Android, there was a chance atvTools could get rid of these space hogs.

I installed its Android app (www.snipca.com/53881) on my phone – it's also available for iOS (www.snipca.com/53882) – and, as instructed, enabled 'debugging' on my Fire Stick. To do so, I went into Settings, chose My Fire TV, then Developer Options and switched on ADB Debugging (see screenshot left).

I opened the atvTools app and it automatically detected my Fire TV Stick over my Wi-Fi network. I selected the device and chose 'OK' on my TV screen to allow the app to remotely connect. Once this was done, atvTools presented me with a set of tools including 'File manager', Reboot and 'Screen record'.

But the option I was interested in was in the Apps tab (1 in our screenshot above), which listed all the apps installed

> "I freed up 427MB, which was enough to install Apple TV+"

on my stick – including hidden Amazon junk I didn't even know was there. Excitedly, I tapped the three-dot icon next to Amazon Photos and selected Uninstall 2, only for atvTools to tell me this was a 'Premium feature' – another frustrating message.

Determined not to give up, I coughed up £1.89 and tried again. A slightly confusing confirmation message warned me that because Amazon Photos is a system app, it "can't be uninstalled fully", but could still be uninstalled for me. This meant I wouldn't be able to reinstall the app if I changed my mind.

That didn't bother me, so I tapped Yes and atvTools confirmed that Amazon Photos had been uninstalled 3. Its entry remained in the Apps list but its size was reduced from 38.9MB to a mere 36KB. I had similar success removing Silk Browser, Freevee and Amazon Music, but Amazon Kids refused to budge.

In all, I managed to free up 427MB of space, which was enough to install Apple TV+ and a couple of other apps. What's more, atvTools was equally effective at removing junk from my Chromecast, so the £1.89 was money well spent, especially because it has lots of other useful features. 'Worth every penny' – now there's a message I'm happy to share.

Need help managing your streaming sticks? Let us know: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Next issue: Robert tries a private version of Windows Recall

palicomp
01270 898 104
sales@palicomp.co.uk

Alpha Phase [IVY3]

INTEL Core i5 12400
ASUS PRIME H610M-K D4
ADATA 32GB DDR4 3200Mhz
ADATA 1TB M.2 nVME
LG 24X DVD+/-RW & BluRay Combo Drive
INTEL HD730 Intergrated Graphics
FRACTAL Core 1100
MICROSOFT Windows 10/11 or 10/11 Pro

Windows 11

£499.99

intel CORE i5 | 32GB RAM | 1TB M.2 SSD

The combination of the Intel Core I5-12400 processor, 32GB of DDR4 RAM, and a 1TB M.2 SSD offers a compelling package for both everyday computing and more demanding tasks such as content creation and photo/video editing use.

AMD Cobra [RYZ10]

AMD Ryzen 5 5600G
ASUS PRIME A520M-K
PALICOMP 16GB DDR4 3200Mhz
ADATA 2TB Legend M.2 nVME
1stPLAYER D3-A Black
AMD Radeon Vega Graphics
MICROSOFT Windows 10/11 or 10/11 Pro

Windows 11

£399.99

AMD RYZEN 5 | 16GB RAM | 2TB M.2 SSD

The Palicomp AMD Cobra is a budget-friendly desktop that offers solid performance for its price. It features an AMD Ryzen 5 5600G processor, 16GB of RAM, and a 1TB SSD, making it suitable for everyday tasks and light gaming.

i5 Aurora [AUR2]

INTEL i5 14400F - 10 Cores - 16 Threads
ASUS B760M-K
CORSAIR 32GB DDR5 6000Mhz
ADATA 2TB M.2 NVMe
NVIDIA RTX4060 8GB
CORSAIR iCUE 4000X
MICROSOFT Windows 10/11 or 10/11 Pro
DEEPCOOL AG400 Air Cooler

£999.99

intel CORE i5 | 32GB RAM | 2TB M.2 SSD

This high-performance PC build featuring the Intel i5-14400F processor, 32GB of DDR5 RAM, a 2TB M.2 SSD, and an NVIDIA RTX 4060 GPU is tailored for gamers, content creators, and power users. With cutting-edge components, this setup promises robust performance and future-proofing for various demanding applications.

www.palicomp.co.uk

NEXTDAY DELIVERY AVAILABLE | intel | 3 YEARS WARRANTY | AMD | Buy Now Pay Later TERMS & CONDITIONS ONLINE

PRE-BUILT PCs - CPU/MOTHERBOARD BUNDLES

*Sales subject to our terms of sale available online - www.palicomp.co.uk - Configuration issues will be advised by phone - any alternatives will also be advised by phone before proceeding with the order. Systems Custom built then are tested 100% prior to dispatch - dispatched via courier for next working day delivery - other delivery options available online. 0% Finance upto 12 months only - terms online - early settlement fee just £29.00 - apply online or phone. Prices inclusive of VAT and free UK mainland shipping. Q-Jump cut-off time 15.00pm.

CYBERPOWERPC

NEXT DAY PCs

ORDER TODAY
GAME TOMORROW

sales@cyberpowersystem.co.uk

03333-237776

intel CORE ULTRA 7 intel CORE ULTRA 9 intel CORE ULTRA 5

Microsoft

9000